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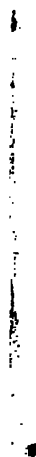
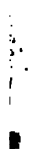
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PAROCHIAL SERMONS

PREACHED IN

A VILLAGE CHURCH.

BY THE

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PREFACE.

FIVE of the following Sermons have already appeared in print: Sermon IX, in the "Original Family Sermons, published under the direction of the Committee of General Literature and Education appointed by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge;" and Sermons II, VII, VIII, and X, in the Church of England Magazine. They are now re-published with the consent of the proprietors of those works. Sermon I. has been published, while the present volume has been passing through the press, in a slightly altered form, as a Tract.

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SERMON I.

PUBLIC WORSHIP: ITS OBJECTS, OBLIGATION, AND
ADVANTAGES.

MATT. xviii. 20.

*Where two or three are gathered together in My
Name, there am I in the midst of them.*

IF a stranger, from some distant part of the world, where Christ's blessed religion is yet unknown, were to travel through our country, the object of all others which would be sure to catch his eye and attract his notice, in almost every village through which he passed, would be the church, with its tower or spire rising amid a cluster of surrounding houses, which seemed to gather round it, as it were, for shelter and protection. It would be very natural for such a person to ask, "What is the use of these buildings, and to what purpose are they applied?" And if he were told, that they are sacred places set apart for the Public Worship of

God, so little idea would he have, if he had been brought up in a heathen land, of Public Worship, that he might as naturally proceed to ask, Why Christians worship God in public, why they consider it a duty to do so, and what advantages they hope to reap from the practice?

My brethren, if there be any occasion on which these questions, or such as these, might as naturally occur to us, who, from being accustomed to the blessings of a Christian land from our childhood, ordinarily move no question about them, it is such an occasion as the present, on which we meet together to celebrate the restoration of this house of God to the uses for which its pious founder designed it, and to which, generation after generation, those, whose bodies now rest peacefully beneath its shadow, have applied it. And if these questions do not naturally and of their own accord occur to us on this occasion, at least they are very fit to be suggested, and very suitable to be entertained. And I shall proceed at once to make them the subjects of our consideration, praying God, (and let us all pray God,) that the thoughts to which they give rise may be the means of leading

us more highly to prize the privilege which God gives us of meeting together in His house, and of stirring us up to labour to improve that privilege with greater pains and diligence than we have ever yet done.

I. The first question then which I would suppose as occurring to us is, Why do we meet together in God's house? What do we come to church for? I do not mean, What is the motive that brings us hither? (though about this also we should do well to ask ourselves; that is, whether we come from a real earnest desire to serve God, or merely from custom, or curiosity, or any other such motive:) but, What do we come to do?

Some perhaps would answer, We come to hear the word of God, we come to hear a sermon.

And this is true; but it is not the whole truth. To hear a sermon is one of the objects for which we meet together in church; but it is not the only one. There are other objects besides: and certainly, if we do not keep the others in view, we are not likely to profit by that one. He that comes to church thinking of little else than about hearing a sermon, lacks that preparation of

the heart, without which the best sermon will do him no good.

To return then to the question, What do we come to church for? I do not think we could find a more comprehensive or better answer, than we have in those words of the Exhortation, which is read at the beginning both of our Morning and Evening Service: "We assemble and meet together to render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at God's hands; to set forth His most worthy praise; to hear His most holy word; and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul."

Observe; here are four distinct objects specified:

1. The first is to join each other in Thanksgiving, according to the Psalmist's exhortation, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: Be thankful unto Him, and bless His name*."

Let us try to bear in mind then, my brethren, whenever we come together to this house, that one thing for which we come is to thank God with our brethren for

* Psalm c. 4.

the manifold and great mercies which we have in common.

And though it is very true that we can thank God when we are alone; yet of all the parts of public worship, there are none which seem more fit to be performed in public than this and that which is next mentioned, Praise. Confession and humiliation might seem to seek for solitude and privacy, but praise and thanksgiving ask for companions. And this is why we so often find the Psalmist calling upon others to join him in blessing and magnifying God's great name. Just as in the parable, the man who has found his lost sheep, and the woman who has found her lost piece of money, are represented as calling each their friends and neighbours together, and bidding them rejoice with them, because they have found that which they had lost. And no doubt if we have any thing of a thankful spirit, if we know at all what "a joyful and pleasant thing it is to be thankful," if our hearts are at all touched with a sense of God's great mercies to us, we shall delight in the thought of joining with our brethren in offering up our tribute of grateful thanks for all His "goodness and lovingkindness to us and

to all men ;” both for “ our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life,” and also, and above all, for “ His inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.”

2. The next object, for which we are said to assemble ourselves together, is to set forth God’s most worthy Praise.

Praise and thanksgiving are very closely connected with each other, but yet they are distinct things. Thanksgiving is for benefits which we have received, and has regard therefore to God’s attributes of mercy and goodness. Praise is the offering up our adoring acknowledgments of all God’s perfections ; not merely of His mercy and goodness, but also of His wisdom and justice, of His truth and faithfulness, of His eternity and greatness and glorious majesty. The Psalms are very much taken up with setting forth God’s praise. If there be one subject which predominates in them more than any other, this is it. You can hardly open the Book of Psalms in any part, but you find David stirring up himself, or calling upon others, to laud and magnify God’s glorious Name. Even those Psalms which were writ-

ten evidently in the midst of deep affliction and distress, and which are taken up mainly with confession or humiliation, or in deploring the sorrows of the writer or of the Church, have often some note or other of praise to enliven them, like a bird's song on a winter's day.

Little as we know of the employments of heaven, this we are certain of, that Praise will form a very principal part of them. In the few glimpses that are given us, whether of that blessed abode itself, or of its types and shadows here, the sounds of adoring voices are almost always heard. Thus in that wondrous and awful vision which Isaiah saw, and which he relates in his sixth chapter, the prophet heard the Seraphim crying one to another, as they stood over against the throne of the Almighty, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory." And St. John, in the Revelation, beheld the same vision, and heard the same voices and the same words; and whenever he describes the employments of the blessed saints, he always represents them as having songs of praise and thanksgiving in their mouths.

And should not Praise then, my brethren,

if it forms so very principal a part of the worship of the Church above, enter largely into the worship of the Church below also? Nay, may not we form some judgment of our measure of preparation for heaven, by the way in which we regard this part of God's service? If our hearts are always in tune for Praise, so that we delight in the employment, is it not a sign that we are growing in meetness for that happy abode? If they are never in tune for it, if it is a weary and unwelcome task, is it not a sign that even if we were admitted into heaven, heaven would be no heaven to us, who have no relish for its joys?

Our Church devotes a large portion of her Service to this angelical work of Praise. We never meet together for public worship but we praise God in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, which have formed a part of the worship of God's saints from age to age for many generations: I mean, those which are read by the Minister and people together, both before the Lessons, and between and after them; not to speak of those which are set to music, and which we should all try to join in singing, both with heart and voice. I say with heart as well as

voice, because whatever men may think of the music which is heard with the ear, the only music which is really acceptable to God, the only music which is worthy of the name, is the music of the heart. And this is according to St. Paul's words, where he exhorts the Ephesians to be "filled with the Spirit, speaking to themselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in their heart to the Lord^b."

So then remember, brethren, this is a second reason for which we come together,—to praise God, to set forth His most worthy Praise. And strive to enter heartily into this part of the Service, and to take delight in it, according to the exhortation of the wise Son of Sirach: "When ye glorify the Lord, exalt Him as much as ye can; for even yet will He far exceed: and when ye exalt Him, put forth all your strength, and be not weary; for ye can never go far enough^c."

3. The third object for which we assemble and meet together is, to hear God's most holy Word: and this we do, not only when the Sermon is preached, but more strictly still when the Bible is read, whether in the Lessons, or the Epistle and Gospel, or else—

^b Ephes. v. 19.

^c Ecclus. xliii. 30.

where. In the one case, we have God's word pure and unmixed; in the other, we have it as it is held up to our view by man—but yet, by a man, who is God's Minister, set apart, among other things, for this very purpose, that he should give himself to the ministry of God's Word, and who is secure therefore of God's help, and guidance, and blessing, if he applies himself to his work with prayer and diligence, and in dependence on Divine grace.

I need not say how necessary an acquaintance with God's Word is to the maintenance of the Christian's life and growth in grace. That Word is compared to food, as being the support and nourishment of the soul: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them;" "As new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby^d." It is compared again to a light, to direct our footsteps along the dark and miry road of the world: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my paths^e." And, dropping comparisons, it is spoken of in direct terms, as "able to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus;"

^d Jerem. xv. 16. 1 Pet. ii. 2.

^e Ps. cxix. 105.

and as “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

The truth is, if men were left to their own unassisted reason they would be immersed in ignorance. Gleams they might have and glimpses of truth, as some of the wiser heathen had, but they would be faint and indistinct, like the grey light, if light it can be called, which we have when the sun is set and the night is fast closing in. Without God’s Word, we could know little of God’s real character; nothing at all of it, as it is displayed to us in Christ Jesus. Without God’s Word, we could know nothing of what is to become of us after death; all would be uncertainty and guess-work, such as it is at this day in heathen lands. Without God’s Word, we should, even with the best advantages otherwise, have a low and, in many cases, a wrong standard of duty, both as regards God, our neighbour, and ourselves. Without God’s Word, we should know nothing of those mighty and constraining motives to holiness, with which revelation furnishes us.

We may see then, from what has been mentioned, some of the advantages which accrue to us from having had the Word of God given to us. But we must remember, it is not enough to have had it given: we need to have it continually sounded in our ears; else it will lose its effect upon us, as it has invariably lost its effect in those countries and churches in which it has been suffered to fall into neglect. It was so among the Jews. St. Paul, in setting forth the high privileges bestowed by God upon that favoured nation, mentions this as the very first, that unto them were committed the oracles of God. Yet those oracles were suffered at one time to lie so neglected, that when Hilkiah the high priest found a copy of the Law in the temple and shewed it to Josiah, the conduct both of the king and the high priest, and all who saw it, plainly proved, that they were strangers to the holy book, in which it was their duty to have read continually, and to have meditated upon it day and night. And it is very observable, that the times preceding this event were among the darkest and most wicked in the whole Jewish history. And the case has been the same in the Christian

Church. It was the neglect of God's Word, both read and preached, that brought in those gross errors both of doctrine and life, which made the Reformation necessary; and nothing, under God, contributed so much to drive away those errors, as the free and wide circulation of the Scriptures, and the faithful and diligent preaching of God's Word. We need then to have God's Word constantly sounding in our ears, and pressed upon our consciences, that we may not forget what we have learnt, and let those things slip which we have heard, and lose the holy impressions which have been made upon us.

This then is the third object for which we meet together in church, to hear God's most holy Word; and a very important object it is. And great cause we have to bless God, both for the large portion of Scripture which our Church has taken care shall be read in her Services, and also for the provision she has made, that the Word of God shall be preached diligently and constantly in all her parishes throughout the land.

4. The fourth object for which we assemble and meet together is to ask those things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul: in one word,

to Pray. Prayer is eminently our business here, and it behoves us to remember that it is, whenever we come together to God's house. God forbid that we should ever leave it out of our thoughts. We come to pray. Whatever else we come to do, we come to pray. And the true way, as I have already remarked, to profit by the Sermon, is to endeavour to pray the Prayers: and not only to pray the Prayers, but also to thank God in the Thanksgivings, to praise Him in the Psalms, and to listen reverently and with a trembling heart to His Word in the Lessons.

In short, this general rule may be given for all: He who would profit by any one part of the Service, must strive to give his whole heart and mind to every part.

Thus I have gone through the four several heads under which the objects for which we assemble and meet together in this house may be ranged. I might add a fifth, viz. to partake of the Sacraments; but it is beside my purpose to dwell on this. I wish rather to confine myself to the objects for which we meet on ordinary occasions; and yet I must not, in saying this, omit to remark, that in the early days

of Christianity, the celebration of the Lord's Supper would have been considered one of the objects for which Christians met ordinarily in their churches. For no Lord's day passed, on which it was not celebrated; and a man would have drawn the eyes of all upon him, who should have ventured to go away without partaking; and if he had done this for three or four Sundays in succession, he would have subjected himself to severe censure.

II. But now it might appear to some that most of the objects for which we meet together might be gained in private; and, if so, that there is no occasion for us, or but little occasion, to seek them in public. Indeed, there are those who actually do excuse themselves on this very ground for staying away from the services of God's house. They say, we can say our prayers at home. It would be well if those who make this excuse would ask themselves, not whether they can, but whether they do, employ themselves in the way they speak of, while others are at church. But even if they do, there is a duty in public worship, which, while we have the opportunity and ability to attend it, we cannot safely neglect.

And as all other duties have their special blessings and advantages annexed to them, so this also. There are blessings and advantages annexed to public worship, over and above those which are annexed to private.

The duty of public worship is very plainly pointed out in those words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where the Apostle charges those to whom he writes, not to forsake the assembling of themselves together, as the manner of some is^c. It seems, persecution was raging against the Church, and it had become dangerous for its members to meet together, as they were thereby the more clearly marked out to their enemies as Christians. One might have thought that this was a sufficient reason why they should be content to worship God at home, certainly a much better reason than the one just now referred to; and some, it appears, acted upon it: but we see the Apostle makes no account of it. He bids them not forsake the assembling of themselves together. This shews sufficiently what our duty is in the matter.

And though, when Scripture plainly sets before us any course as the course of duty,

^c Heb. x. 25.

it ought to be enough for us that Scripture does so, even though we could not understand the reason why it does; yet in the case before us, it is not difficult to see some of the reasons why we should not be satisfied with worshipping God only in private. One may well be, that we are not merely separate individuals, having no link or connexion with others, but members of a society, and that society the Church, of which Christ is the Head, in whom we are all knit together in the closest fellowship, being all of us, in that we are members of Christ, members one of another. So far as we are separate individuals, we may well have, and ought to have, our private worship; but so far as we belong to the society which has been spoken of, and are members one of another, it is right that we should join with our brethren in offering up our common prayers and our common praises to our common God. And yet further, and what is a very material point, it is our duty, as Christians, publicly to confess our faith in Christ, and to shew that we are not ashamed to own ourselves His disciples, however men may scorn us and ridicule us for it. In the early days of Christianity, the matter of profession was

neither more nor less than the being a Christian. Now, in a Christian country, it is not the being a Christian—for all call themselves Christians, how little soever they may walk worthy of the name—but the being a serious, earnest, devout Christian, one who is anxious to serve God, and to walk in His ways. And it is our duty first to be such, and then to be ready to own that we are. And one way in which we have an opportunity of owning that we are is the openly joining ourselves to God's servants, in their assemblies for God's worship.

III. As to the advantages of public worship over private, I do not know that they could be summed up better than under these two heads. Public has more promises, and more warmth^h.

1. It has all the promises that private worship has, and these besides: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven; for where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst

^h "Though private prayer be a brave design,
Yet public hath more promises, more love."

Herbert's Church Porch.

of them¹." See here what efficacy our Lord attributes to consenting prayer. What He delights to see is the harmony of brethren dwelling together in unity. And where brethren do so dwell together, there, as the Psalmist expresses it, hath the Lord promised His blessing, even life for evermore^k. And mark too the promise of His presence in the second of the two verses: "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them." Christ is with His servants individually no doubt: but he is especially present in the assemblies of His saints. One very remarkable instance we have on record, in which He shewed His presence sensibly and miraculously. We read, that when Peter and John were let go from their confinement, after the cure wrought upon the lame man at the beautiful gate of the temple, they and the rest of the disciples lifted up their voices with one accord in prayer. "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness." And it is observable, that on the day of Pentecost,

¹ Matt. xviii. 19, 20.^k Ps. cxxxiii. 3.

when the Holy Ghost was for the first time shed forth upon the Church, the disciples are described as being "all with one accord in one place¹."

And should it not fill us with deep awe and holy reverence, my brethren, to think of this blessed promise? And yet at times, perhaps, we have been here, and have never thought of it, from the time we entered till the time we left; so that we might have said as Jacob, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and we knew it not²." Yes, the Lord *is* in this place, and to those who have eyes to see, and hearts to understand, and who come hither to worship God in spirit and in truth, "this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

And is it so indeed? O how should the thought of this check all irreverent and light behaviour! What! are we met together on the most solemn business which it is possible for men to transact? Are we met together, to join ourselves in one band, and send up our united prayers and praises to the great God? And is God present among us of a truth, as truly present, though we see Him not, as we are ourselves? And dare

¹ Acts iv. 24—31. ii. 1.

² Gen. xxviii. 16.

any one trifle in such a place, on such an occasion, in such a presence? When God would speak with Moses from the burning bush, He bade him put off his shoes from off his feet, for the place whereon he stood was holy ground. And shall not we also put off the shoes of our minds, so to speak,—our worldly thoughts, our vain imaginations, as well as the outward behaviour which betokens them too plainly to be mistaken?

Let us take time to consider, before we come to church, whither we are coming, and on what a deeply solemn errand; and let us not leave our homes before we have been upon our knees to beseech God to fill us with the spirit of reverence and holy fear; and let us think with ourselves as we approach these gates, “How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this the gate of heaven.” It will be our own fault, much as this is to say, if it do not prove so to us.

2. The other advantage of public worship over private, which was mentioned, was, that it has more warmth. And it *has* more warmth wherever it is entered into in its own spirit. We naturally do with more heart and energy what we do with others,

than what we do by ourselves. In public worship we stir up each other's devotion, not to say that we draw forth each other's love. Do I seem to any to be using words without meaning, when I speak thus? Are these but imaginary advantages, and not real ones, which have been described? Nay rather, if to any they are unmeaning, is not the fault their own, in that they have never striven to enter into the spirit either of public worship, or of our Church's service? Come with real seriousness; regard those around you as your brethren in Christ; leave your private prayers at home, and pray now not as though by yourselves, but as with your brethren; not as though for yourselves, but as for yourselves with your brethren. Let your very outward gestures shew that you take a lively part in the whole Service; kneel when it is the time to kneel, stand when it is the time to stand. Join heartily in the responses, in those parts of the Service where it is the place to make responses, and do not be afraid or ashamed to hear the sound of your own voices. It is very true that these are merely outward things, and that what God mainly looks at is the heart; but yet outward things have their

influence upon the state of the heart, just as the state of the heart unavoidably affects them. Come then, my brethren, I say, in this spirit; do all you can in this way to enter heartily into the Service; and then judge whether there is not a seriousness, and warmth, and fervour, in public worship, which shall make you ready to cry with David, whenever you think of the happy privileges of this house, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness".

^a Ps. lxxxiv. 1, 2, 10.

SERMON II.

ST. PAUL AND DEMAS: THE NECESSITY AND BLESSED-
NESS OF PERSEVERANCE.

2 TIM. iv. 6—10.

I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing. Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me; for Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.

THESE words occur in a passage, which sets before us, within the compass of a few verses, the stages of Christian progress in remarkable variety. We have Timothy, a young man full of promise; so full as to cheer the Apostle, who was now looking forward to his own speedy dissolution, with the hope of the signal service which he would do to the cause of Christ. We have Luke—probably an older person, one long

tried, and found faithful in every trial—still clinging to the aged Apostle ; clinging to him at a time when most men were afraid or ashamed to own him. We have Mark, who had formerly left him, and whose departure had given rise to that unhappy difference between himself and Barnabas, again one of his fellow-labourers, “profitable unto him for the ministry,” and “a comfort unto him,” and walking worthy of his vocation. We have Demas, not long before associated with St. Paul, his fellow-labourer and companion, and so, apparently, holding a place of some prominence in the Church, forsaking him, and shrinking from the cross, out of love to this present world. And, last of all, we have the Apostle himself, now standing upon the verge of the eternal world, his labours, his sufferings, his trials, his conflicts, on the point of closing ; no longer using the diffident language of former days, and intimating the possibility of his coming short of heaven, but looking forward with assured faith and exulting hope to the glory that should be revealed.

The Church of Christ has shewn in all ages the same varieties of character and proficiency. She has ever had her Timothies,

her Lukes, her Marks, her Demases, her Pauls—stars, so to speak, of various magnitudes; some rising, others at their meridian, others setting; some coming forth from behind a cloud, which for a time had darkened them; others falling from their spheres, and, after glaring for a moment, quenched and lost to sight for ever.

Let us fix our attention, in this group, on the two characters of St. Paul and Demas.

The point to which our eyes turn, the moment we look towards the Apostle, is the assured confidence with which he speaks of his acceptance with God. And the blessedness of his long course of steady and consistent perseverance is set off and heightened by the contrast of Demas's worldly-mindedness and inconstancy.

Of Demas we have mention in two other places. St. Paul sends his name, among others, in the salutations with which he closes the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon—Epistles evidently written at the same time—probably about two years previously to the Epistle to Timothy, now before us. Remarkably enough, his name occurs in connexion with St. Luke's, wherever it

is spoken of: "Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you^d." "There salute thee Epaphras, my fellow-prisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers^e." So far, all seems well: Demas is reckoned among the Apostle's friends and associates. But hear once more: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica. Only Luke is with me^f."

This is the last time the name of Demas is mentioned. What became of him afterwards—whether he went on from step to step, giving up first one point and then another, till he had sunk into utter recklessness and irreligion, or whether, by God's grace, he arose again and pursued his heavenward course as before—we cannot tell. This is the account with which, as far as he is concerned, the record of Scripture closes: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."

And the point which I would particularly remark in it is its contrast with what we read of St. Paul. Demas had run well. He had set out in the way to life: he had

^d Col. iv. 14. ^e Philem. 23, 24. ^f 2 Tim. iv. 10, 11.

occupied a place of some prominence in the Church : he had, for a time, held by the Apostle in his affliction, and had not been ashamed to be seen in his company, or to acknowledge him as his friend. But, at length, whether because the storm of persecution had waxed fiercer, or some strong temptation in the way of worldly wealth, or honour, or ease, had been held out, his strength of purpose was exhausted, and he sank, like a tired swimmer, and was seen no more.

Very different had been the Apostle's course. He was now drawing to the close of a life which, for many years, had been wholly devoted to the cause of Christ ; and, during all that time, trials of the severest kind and of every variety had been his portion. He was at this moment a prisoner, daily expecting sentence of death ; and, what added, no doubt, exceedingly to the bitterness of his sufferings, almost all his friends had forsaken him. There were, indeed, some bright exceptions ; and the deep thankfulness with which he speaks of these shows how acutely he must have felt the opposite conduct. Still he stood unshaken. None of these trials moved him,

nor induced him to swerve a hair's-breadth from his purpose. On he went, through evil report and good report, faithful unto death.

And observe the reward of his faithfulness :—how he is enabled to rise above his sufferings, and to glory in them ; yea, more, what confidence and most strong assurance he has in the prospect of approaching death ; “ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.”

The great lessons, then, which are set before us, in what is recorded of these two characters, are, first, The necessity of perseverance in the ways of godliness ; and, secondly, The blessedness of such perseverance.

I. The Necessity of perseverance. Herein, indeed, lies a great part of our trial ; nay, one of the chief difficulties of a religious life. There are thousands who are attracted to Christ, and cleave to Him sincerely for a time, yea, and do and suffer many things, as Demas probably did, for His sake, who

yet afterwards grow careless and indifferent. They become used to religion, so to speak. Its novelty has gone, and with its novelty its charms ; and they are tired, and want something fresh and exciting. It is far easier, humanly speaking, to do one or two signal actions, or to resist one or two strong temptations, than to hold on for weeks and months and years in consistent obedience, and submission to the will of God in the common trials of life. And yet it is in this very steadfastness that a religious course consists. This is what makes the chief difference between the true servant of God and the mere professor of godliness.

And now, brethren, I beseech you, put the question plainly and honestly to yourselves, Are you holding on steadily in the right way ? I trust some are ; God be thanked for His grace ! but are not there others, who are drawing back, and growing weary in well-doing ? There was a time, perhaps, when they would not have let a day pass without reading the word of God : but now, the Bible is seldom opened, unless it be on Sundays. There was a time, when it pained them if their thoughts were not intently engaged while they were at prayer : now,

they suffer them to wander, with little or no compunction. There was a time, when they were careful to improve the Lord's day, employing it diligently for God, and striving to advance the work of their salvation: now, it is a weary day; and they are glad to make it as short as they can, by rising late and going to bed early. There was a time, when nothing was suffered to keep them from church but sickness, or some other urgent cause: now, a shower of rain, or the coming in of a neighbour, or some other such trifling hindrance, is excuse sufficient. There was a time, when they knelt regularly at the Lord's Table, whenever the Communion was administered: now, they rarely present themselves, or, it may be, have left off coming altogether. Thus I might go on suggesting matter for self-examination through various particulars. But I have said enough: let conscience do the rest. Only, brethren, do not refuse to hearken to her voice. Far better that she should speak now, while there is yet time to obey her dictates, than at the hour of death, when it will be too late.

The cause of Demas's apostasy (or whatsoever it was) was his love of this present

world. Perhaps he could not bring himself to give up his worldly prospects: he was too much wedded to the ease, the comforts, the indulgences, the wealth, the reputation, of this life, to part with them for Christ. He was not equal to bearing his cross, in company with the Apostle, after a crucified Master.

And are we ready to condemn Demas, my brethren? O, let us first look at home! Demas's was a miserable choice, doubtless—the world in preference to Christ; but before we condemn his conduct, let us be sure that we ourselves are free from blame. All love the world more than Christ, who will not resign the world when Christ calls. For instance, one man will not serve God openly and to the extent of his conscience, because he is afraid of being remarked upon by his neighbours, and perhaps treated coldly and scornfully; another is fond of his ease, and shrinks from the labour and self-denial and constant watchfulness of a religious life; a third cannot resist the temptation held out by some opportunity of gain—not perhaps unfair gain, according to the world's standard, but yet such as will not bear the test of God's word; a fourth is swallowed up

with his business, or his other occupations, so that he has neither time nor inclination for religion. If he says his prayers night and morning, and observes such other forms as are usual with those among whom he lives, that is the most; but, as for having God and Christ and heaven often in his thoughts, and framing his conduct upon the principles of Scripture, these are things with which he little, if at all, concerns himself.

We may see plainly, by considering such a case as this of Demas, the reason why our Lord spoke so strongly of the danger of riches. It was not that the good things of this world are evil in themselves; but that it is hard indeed to have them, or to have the prospect of them, and yet to be willing to part with them without murmuring when God calls. It is hard to be a rich man, and yet at the same time a good soldier of Jesus Christ, ready to encounter dangers and endure hardships in His cause. There are bright and honourable exceptions, doubtless; but, for the most part, riches make men soft, and fond of ease, and too well satisfied with things present to have much regard for things future.

II. But let us pass on to the Blessedness of perseverance. What Demas's enjoyments were of the world he had loved we are not told ; but we may guess. Doubtless he had his reward. They are miserable gratifications, which are bought at the expense of conscience ; glittering perhaps, as though they promised every thing that could be desired, while yet in prospect, but, once obtained, turning to gall and wormwood. Judas's history affords a warning instance. No sooner was he in possession of the money, which had been, as it were, the bait to allure him, than he cast it from him, and went and hanged himself. We may guess then, I say, in some measure, the fruit which Demas had of his apostasy. But what a different spectacle is afforded by St. Paul ! He is in prison : his friends have forsaken him, and are afraid to own him : he is at the mercy of a cruel tyrant, who will think no more of spilling his blood than of pouring water upon the ground : he is expecting daily to be brought out, to be put to death. Are not these circumstances enough to cast a damp over his spirits ? to make him dejected and melancholy ? No ; his soul rises above them all, as joy-

ously as the lark springs up above the morning mists. Never, in the whole course of his history, does he seem more full of peace and blessedness.

And this, my dear brethren, is the ordinary reward of persevering devotedness to God. Every single act of devotedness has its recompense. There is a sweetness in self-denial, which no pleasures of the world can equal. To be at peace within, to have the testimony of one's own conscience that one is walking uprightly,—(not that one is without sin, but in sincerity seeking to do and suffer whatsoever God wills,)—surely this is far sweeter music to the soul than all the praises of our fellow-men ; aye, so sweet, that, with it, censures and reproaches and calumnies are no more regarded, than a man by his fireside cares for the wind when it whistles outside his house on a winter's night : they only make the inward peace more sensibly felt.

I said, every single act of devotedness has its recompense ; but how much more a whole life spent for God, and in His service ! Be sure of this : God has a special reward for those who have been eminently diligent. It is true they can put in no claim on the

score of merit; for, let conscience approve as much as it may, there will still be numberless shortcomings and imperfections: Christ's merits alone can be their ground of acceptance. Still, God's ordinary rule in spiritual things, as in temporal, is to let His blessing rest upon persevering diligence.

And here I must confess I cannot understand how a man, whose life, till within the last few days or weeks of his death, has been spent in forgetfulness of God and in the neglect of religion, should die, what is called, triumphantly. I do not deny that such a one may be pardoned, and may even have some sense of pardon, and so far a humble trembling hope of heaven; but any thing like triumph and exultation seems so contrary to God's ordinary method of dealing with us, that one cannot but feel suspicious of it. Strong confidence and assured hope would seem the privilege rather of those who have long walked steadily in the ways of God. Not, as has been said already, that this is the foundation of their assurance; but it is, doubtless, a very satisfactory proof to them that they are not deceiving themselves, that their fervour and earnestness are not

merely the effects of temporary excitement, but the settled habit of their souls.

And now to gather together two or three heads for practical consideration, such that we may take them home with us, and think over them, and by God's grace act upon them.

1. Let us take heed of coldness and indolence in God's service. Depend upon it, these will tell one day. They will tell when we come to die. We may possibly, by God's mercy, be enabled to repent and believe the Gospel sincerely and earnestly, and so, through Christ, be forgiven and accepted; though this is more than any man has a right to calculate upon, who is wilfully living below the standard of his conscience. Still, we are storing up, in all probability, hours of deep gloom and thick darkness, hours of doubt and despondency and alarm. There is no death-bed, generally speaking, so full of terrors as his, who has lived all his life partially under the influence of conscience, but not wholly. The wicked, for the most part, have "no bands in their death;" their hearts are seared by a long course of resistance to the voice of conscience. But it is

otherwise with such men as I now speak of. In their case, the voice of conscience, though many times disregarded, has never been wholly drowned. And, now that it has gained a hearing, it speaks in a tone of thunder.

2. Let us remember, too, our need of perseverance. This, as has been said, is one great part of our trial : not merely whether we will resist this or the other temptation, but whether we will hold on to the end. The promise of eternal life is made to those who, “ by *patient continuance* in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality⁵.” I speak then to all who are, as they trust, entered in good earnest on the heavenward course, but more especially to the young : See that you do not rest satisfied with any present attainments. Thank God, if you have made good your ground thus far ; but at the same time press forward. Fear the least abatement of your diligence : watch against the first symptoms of declension : stir up the gift of God which is in you, and use every means which God has appointed for strengthening and increasing the life of faith.

⁵ Romans ii. 7.

3. And O let us all watch against the love of this present world. Demas is not the only one whom it has seduced. We must learn to sit loosely by present things, and to moderate our expectations of happiness from them. God is the only source of happiness. His service is the only real blessedness. He that looks for much from any thing on this side of heaven, is laying up for himself a store of disappointment and vexation, and at the same time suffering his attention to be turned aside from the true riches. I know how easy it is to talk of the unsatisfactoriness of earthly goods, even while we are setting our hearts on them the most intently. But we must strive not to talk, but to practise. Of course, whatsoever blessings pertaining to this life are bestowed upon us we are to accept, and to accept thankfully, as God's gifts; yea, and to use, and enjoy while we use them. Still, we must give God the chief place in our hearts; and all other things must be valued for God's sake, and in proportion as they lead us to Him.

I will not close without one word of exhortation to those who have scarcely been

at all contemplated in the course of these remarks ; those who are not only not serving God, but are plunged in a course of sin, avowedly neglecting their souls. O, my dear brethren, does it not move you to hear such blessed words as those which have been read uttered in a dying hour : “ I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith : henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness ? ” Do not you also wish to die the death of the righteous ? Then remember, such a death is still within your reach. Jesus Christ died for you. God willeth not that you should perish. Bad as your lives may have been, there is still forgiveness for you, if you will turn with earnest and hearty repentance from your evil ways, and seek forgiveness in Christ’s Name. Strong as may be the power of sin, confirmed as it may be, and grown habitual by long indulgence, you may yet be delivered, if you will wait on God for the gift of His Holy Spirit, and cherish the presence of that blessed Being within your heart, by hearkening to His voice, and yielding yourselves obediently to His dictates. The worst thing you have to fear, next to utter indifference,

is despondency ; giving up yourselves for lost, thinking that you have neglected your souls so long, that your case is hopeless. O do not yield to such thoughts. Remember your Saviour's words ; " There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth^h." Let there be joy over you in the presence of that blessed company to-day.

^h Luke xv. 10.

SERMON III.

ZACCHEUS.

LUKE xix. 10.

The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

IT seemed a hard saying which our Lord spake, when He said, "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." But yet, lest we should misunderstand His meaning, and think that it is impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God, we are furnished with more than one instance of such persons becoming His disciples. Zaccheus was a rich man. It is not a little remarkable, that the story of Zaccheus follows in the very next chapter after that in which those words of our Lord are recorded.

I propose to call your attention to the account given us of Zaccheus. I will read it as it stands, making some remarks as I proceed; and I will then gather out of it

such practical instruction as it suggests. God grant us His Holy Spirit, that we may seriously apply our hearts to what shall be brought before us. There is much that well deserves the thoughtful consideration of all, whether rich or poor.

“Jesus entered and passed through Jericho.” Our Lord was on His way to Jerusalem for the last time. He was going up to attend that passover at which He was put to death.

“And behold there was a man named Zaccheus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.” Here we have a description of the person, who holds so conspicuous a place in the narrative which is to follow. He was a publican. The publicans were the collectors of the taxes, and, as such, were held in great abhorrence by the Jews, on more accounts than one. In the first place,—these taxes were levied by the Romans. It was as if England had been conquered by the French, and we were obliged to pay tribute to the French government. The Jews were reminded, every time they paid their taxes, that they were in subjection to foreigners. So that, even in this

respect, the persons who gathered the taxes could hardly help being disliked by them. But further,—it was a very common opinion throughout the nation, that it was positively wrong to pay these taxes. They believed that God was their King, and that to pay taxes to an earthly sovereign, and that sovereign a foreigner and a heathen, was a sort of denial of God's sovereignty. We see an indication of this feeling in the question which was put to our Lord, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar?" Most of the Jews thought it was not lawful. Here then was an additional reason why the publicans should be held in so great abhorrence. They were looked upon as little better than the devil's agents, and if, as was the case with Zaccheus, they were Jews themselves, this only made them the more hateful, because they seemed to be betraying both their country and their religion for the sake of their miserable gains. These circumstances considered, we shall not wonder that we so often find the Jews speaking of the publicans with contempt and abhorrence, as though they were persons of the worst characters;—persons whom no one of respectability would be seen with. And it should be added, that, for the most

part, there was too much reason for this way of speaking. Great numbers of them were persons of very bad character. They made no scruple how they came by their money, so they could but obtain it. They farmed each the taxes of a certain district, paying so much for them to the government, and then all that they could exact over and above, they had for themselves. This put a strong temptation in their way to extort and oppress as much as they could, and they were not often proof against it.

Zaccheus was one of these. He is called "the chief among the publicans." Perhaps he was, as we should say in our way of speaking, a master-publican; farming an extensive district, and letting out portions of it to others under him.

St. Luke adds, "and he was rich." If his being a publican was likely to be a hindrance in the way of his salvation, his being a rich publican was still more so.

"And he sought to see Jesus, who He was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature." He had doubtless often heard of Jesus. But now that He was in the town, he had a curiosity to see Him; for it does not appear that he had any other

motive than curiosity. So “ he ran before, and climbed up into a sycomore tree to see Him, for He was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zaccheus, make haste and come down ; for to-day I must abide at thy house. And Zaccheus made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully.” This was an unexpected favour indeed. All Zaccheus had thought of was to have a sight of Jesus as He passed along the street. But, behold, Jesus singles him out, and invites Himself to his house ; yea, as the event proved, to his heart. Curiosity is a poor motive for any one to be led by ; and yet God, who turns all things to His purpose, has, in other cases besides this, used it to draw men to Himself. There have been those who have come to church out of curiosity, or have opened their Bibles or other good books out of curiosity, whose attention has been arrested, and their hearts touched, and they have been brought to know and love that Saviour, for whom till then they had had little regard. Would to God it might be so to-day, if there be any here who have come whether from this or from any like motive.

“And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, that He was gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner.” Here was the contempt and hatred of which I spoke, breaking forth. This was not the first time that the Jews had taken offence at our Lord’s associating with such persons. “Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners^a?” was a question put to His disciples in the beginning of His ministry. And at a later time, when there drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners to hear Him, the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them^b.” But I will return to this point presently. Our Lord went wherever there was an opportunity of doing good. If He was found at times in the company of notorious sinners, it was not to countenance them in their sins, but to recover them from their sins.

“And Zaccheus stood, (stood up, that is,) and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” Here was indeed a proof that the Saviour

^a Matt. ix. 11.

^b Luke xv. 2.

had come not only into his house, but into his heart. Christ's condescension and grace have won upon him, and brought him to repentance, while the stern looks and cold and distant bearing of the self-righteous Jews have had no effect.

“ And Jesus said unto him, (or, concerning him,) This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also,” sinful as he may have been, despised as he still may be, “ is a son of Abraham,” and therefore one of those lost sheep of the house of Israel to whom I am sent. “ For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

Such is the story of Zaccheus : now let us endeavour, with God's help, to draw some instruction from it. There are three or four principal points, to which it may be well to turn our attention.

1. Observe, first, what was the first step towards Zaccheus's conversion : he placed himself where Christ was to pass. Not, as has been remarked already, that he appears to have had any better motive than curiosity in doing so : still, his being there, under God, led to his becoming savingly acquainted with the Saviour. Had he stayed at home,

in all probability he would not have had Christ for his guest; he would not have believed unto salvation.

My brethren, they who would know the Saviour now, must still do as Zaccheus did: they must place themselves where He is wont to pass. But where is this? I may say generally, wherever duty and God's providence call them. Let us strive to be always where God would have us be, and to be occupied in the work in which God would have us occupied, and we need not doubt but Christ will pass by the road. But especially, let us wait upon Him in His own ordinances—in prayer, in the study of His word, in His house, at His table. We may rest assured, none who seek Him thus shall seek in vain. It is true, they may not behold Him on the first occasion, nor on the second, nor on the third. But let them still wait. Christ sees them, though they may not see Him; yea, it may be, Christ is blessing them, and even coming unto them, and taking up His abode with them, though they are as yet scarcely conscious of His presence.

And what we read of Zaccheus may suggest to us not only to place ourselves, so to speak, in Christ's way, but to endeavour to

persuade others to do so too. We cannot actually bring those, whose best welfare we desire, to Christ ; we cannot touch their hearts, and cause them to repent and believe and love. These require a divine power. But we may bring them where Christ is to be found ; we may prevail upon them to retire from the press and throng of the world's business for prayer and the reading of God's word ; we may prevail upon them to be diligent in presenting themselves before God in His house, or at His table, when perhaps they are wavering, and ready to invent excuses for staying away. And who shall say what blessings God may have in store for them ? Who can tell the high honour which awaits those, who have been the instruments in God's hands of bringing home even one lost sheep to the fold of the good Shepherd !

2. Another point is the constraining influence of God's grace upon Zaccheus's heart. Observe what a change was wrought in this man in so short a space. Hitherto he had lived only for this present world. He had been engrossed with his business ; and, as his words imply, he had, like too many of his brethren, not always been

scrupulous how he carried it on. But no sooner does Christ speak to him, than he comes down, and receives Him joyfully ; and though he might have done this, and still have loved his sins and continued in them, his words and deeds following gave proof that his heart had been brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Blessed be God, there is no heart so hard which grace cannot soften. We are too apt to despair, whether of ourselves or others. Many a one is ready to think that his case is past remedy, that he has gone on in the ways of sin so long, and has become so hardened in his evil habits, that there is no hope. And it is true, if he looks only to himself. But with God all things are possible. And let such a one consider for his encouragement, that others as far gone as himself, it may be farther, have been recovered. But then if he desires such grace to be exhibited in himself, he must arise and seek it ; God will not give it him while he sits idle. Let him begin to pray in good earnest : this is the first step. Let him acknowledge his past guilt, and cry for mercy in Christ's name, and seek the gift of the Holy Spirit, that he may mortify sin, and walk in the

ways of righteousness; and let him shew that he is in earnest, by striving to live up to the light he has, casting off his evil companions, and laying aside whatever practices his conscience tells him are wrong.

And the same applies to others. We are not to give men up. We are not to allow ourselves to think of any, while he yet lives, that his case is hopeless. It may be, the giving way to such thoughts is nothing but a cloak for our own indolence and our indifference about a brother's soul; an excuse for remitting our exertions, and forbearing to make efforts for his conversion. There was a time when Zaccheus would have been thought as unlikely a person to become a disciple of Jesus as any man in the world. If any one had seen him engaged in his business, immersed in the cares of his daily occupation, perhaps pressing hardly upon some poor man from whom he was extorting more than his due, he would have been ready to say, It is a thing impossible. And so of Saul of Tarsus also, when he was breathing out persecution against the servants of the Lord. But God has all hearts in His hands; and though we cannot but feel that some cases are more hopeful

than others, yet indeed as there is none which does not need His grace, so there is none which is beyond its influence.

3. But we must observe, thirdly, that wherever the grace of God does work, it shews itself by these tokens : First, it leads men heartily to embrace the Saviour. Zaccheus came down, and received Christ joyfully into his house. And we must do the like ; we must receive Him into our hearts, accept Him for our Saviour, put our whole trust in His merits, yea, and we must make ready our hearts for the reception of such a guest, cleansing them, by the help of the Holy Spirit, from all impurity, and from whatsoever may offend Him, which indeed is another token. Zaccheus had been hitherto intent only upon his gains ; but now, observe the change ; “ Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.” He does not say this by way of ostentation and boast. It is his solemn surrender of himself to Christ. And if we are wholly devoted to God, we shall follow his example. There is no law indeed in Scripture which binds us to give this precise portion, half of our goods, in

charity. The truth is, as Christians, we are bound to look upon all we have as God's; and to regard ourselves as accountable to Him for the use we make of it. And truly if we love Him, we shall rejoice in spending it in His service, and in ministering to the wants of His people. But it may be well, if we each of us take the hint from the proportion here mentioned in Zaccheus's case, to enquire, as far as we can, what is *our* measure? what proportion does the sum we give in charity bear to our incomes? I do not ask, Is it half, or even a fourth part, but, Is it a sixth, or a tenth, or a twentieth? If a man has an income of £100, does he devote £20 of that, or £10, or £5, to charitable purposes? Zaccheus's proportion was £50. But there is an old proverb, that we must be just before we are generous; and in this likewise we find Zaccheus setting us an example. He makes restitution whereinssoever he has wronged any, and that not merely a restitution of the precise sum which he had unjustly gotten, but fourfold. And I do not see how any man can think himself a true penitent, who is not ready to tread here in Zaccheus's steps. Fourfold restitution indeed is not required, but an

equivalent is the least than can be rendered. No right-minded Christian indeed will be content to keep in his possession gains unjustly or unfairly gotten. He cannot look upon them as his own. Neither can he properly bestow them in charity. We are not to bring robbery for burnt-offering. He has but one course,—to restore them to the rightful owner. It may be painful and humiliating to do this, perhaps much more annoying to his pride than to his covetousness; but if men will turn aside from the right path, they must not be surprised if they smart for their folly. This is indeed the penalty of all sin, how pleasant soever it may seem at the time; it is only making work for repentance here, or remorse hereafter. And what has been said of unjust gains, is equally true of unpaid debts. If a man is really in earnest, he will not withhold from his neighbour that which is his due, when it is in the power of his hand to pay it. What is the difference between refusing to pay a man what we owe him, and robbing him outright?

4. But to pass on to another point, which the history of Zaccheus brings before us. Observe the spirit in which the Jews (the

Pharisees probably) regarded our Lord's treatment of Zaccheus. "He is gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." So it is: there is a most strong reluctance in the natural heart to admit the thought of God's free grace. We see the same spirit still. Men cannot bear to hear of the Gospel being preached in all its fulness and freeness to persons who have led lives of more than ordinary wickedness. But God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are His ways our ways. It is true, indeed, we may well speak cautiously of such persons, and it behoves them especially to speak tremblingly of themselves; for a heart that has been so seared, as theirs must have been, has double need to be watched with jealousy and suspicion. Still the terms of the Gospel remain the same. Remission of sin in Christ's name, yea of all sin, the deepest, darkest, foulest sin, is preached to all who truly repent and unfeignedly believe. "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive*." "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from

* Ezek. xviii. 27.

before my eyes ; cease to do evil ; learn to do well. . . . Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord : Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool^b.” “ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon^c.” “ The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin^d.”

There is then full and free forgiveness for all who truly and unfeignedly turn to Christ ; and it savours of the spirit of the Pharisees to doubt it. Indeed, who might hope for pardon, were the sinfulness of the most sinful made a ground for doubting God's forgiveness, supposing him sincerely penitent ? God forbid that we should account all sins equal, and say that there is no difference between those who have striven to serve God in holy obedience, and those who have committed all uncleanness with greediness. Of course there is a difference ; and in that day, when every man shall be judged according to his works, the difference will be seen. Still, the best has

^b Isai. i. 16—18.

^c Isai. lv. 7.

^d 1 John i. 7.

come infinitely short of God's righteousness, and stands in need of pardon as truly as the worst; and it shews that we have but shallow views of the exceeding evil and hatefulness of sin, if we are blind to this.

5. But I am already touching upon the next, and indeed the last, point, to which I desire to call your attention,—our Lord's reply to the murmuring of the Jews: "This day is salvation come to this house, for as much as he also is a son of Abraham: for the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Yes, it was for this very purpose, that He might bring back His wandering sheep into His fold, that the Lord Jesus came down from heaven. The farther they have wandered, the more deeply they have entangled themselves in the toils of sin, so much the more are they the objects of the Saviour's compassion. Do not we remember those three most touching parables, which a remark like that which the Jews made in reference to Zaccheus drew forth from our Lord? The parable of the lost sheep; the parable of the lost piece of money; and the parable of the prodigal son? And do not we remember the lesson which our Lord Himself gathered from the

two former. "Even so there is joy in the presence of the Angels of God over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance^o?"

Hear me then, my dear brethren, if there be any of this description present to-day;—any who have been wandering onward and onward in the paths of sin, like Zaccheus, wholly bent on the present world, thinking of nothing but their gains, and not always concerning themselves that they came honestly and fairly by their money; or like the Prodigal, wasting their substance in riotous living, spending their money, or their time, or their good name, or their health, in miserable enjoyments, if they can be called enjoyments, pleasures which are full of bitterness, and leave a sting behind;—hear me, I say, while I once more set before you, in Christ's name, the offers of salvation. Wicked as you have been, there is yet forgiveness for you. God is still yearning over you with a Father's compassion; Christ is still waiting to receive you. Lo, He says to you, as He said to Zaccheus, "Come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house." Will

• Luke xv. 7, 10.

you still turn a deaf ear? Do you still cling to your sins? Then I have nothing more to say. I cannot offer you a salvation which may consist with these. Christ came to deliver you *from* your sins, not to save you *in* them. But if you are indeed resolved upon a wiser choice: if the Holy Spirit has touched your hearts, and the love of God has melted your coldness, and softened your hard indifference, and you are ready to accept Christ as your Saviour and your Lord, draw nigh, and humble yourselves before God for your past transgressions, confessing them fully and unreservedly before Him, and imploring forgiveness in His Son's name, and doubt not but that you shall be received into the number of His children. And then go forth, and let the mercies of God constrain you to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto Him, to walk before Him in all holy watchfulness and self-denial, labouring to redeem the time which has been lost, and to undo the evil which has been done, and giving all diligence to fit yourselves for that pure and holy heaven, into which nothing that is impure, nothing that is unholy, shall ever enter.

SERMON IV.

SIGNS OF DECLENSION IN RELIGION.

Preached on the fourth Sunday in Advent.

REV. iii. 11.

Behold, I come quickly : hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

THIS was our Lord's charge to the angel, that is, the bishop or chief pastor, of the Church in Philadelphia, and, in him, to the whole Church over which he presided. There was more to praise in this Church than in most of the other Churches to which His messages were sent: "I know thy works:" was His commendation, "behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold I will make them to come and worship

before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." And then follows the charge which I have just read, "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Though the Church in Philadelphia had that which drew forth her Lord's commendation, though she had kept His word and had not denied His name, and though she was cheered with the promise that He would keep her from the hour of temptation, still she needed the exhortation to *hold fast*. The truth is, that though God would keep her, yet He would not do so but through her own instrumentality.

And all Christians need to have the same exhortation pressed and pressed again upon their attention. All need repeated admonitions, warnings, and rebukes, that they be not weary, but patiently persevere in the ways of God. All are apt, after the first fervours of a religious life are past, to faint and grow languid, and so are in danger of losing what was before gained, and by con-

sequence of losing the soul itself, by slackening their diligence, and giving way to temptation.

My brethren, how does the case stand with us? Are we holding fast that which we once had, or are we laxing our hold, and suffering it insensibly to escape from our grasp? This is a very serious question, and one which it behoves us to ask ourselves at all seasons, but especially at this time, when the Church is calling us to bethink ourselves of our Lord's coming, and when the year, fast drawing to a close, is admonishing us to look into our affairs, and see how they stand both for this world and the next, before we enter on a new reckoning.

It shall be my object then to lay before you some of the signs by which a declining state of religion may be known.

But before we can properly enter into the consideration of the signs of declension in religion, we must first have a right understanding of the nature of that state from which there is a possibility or a danger of our declining. When it is said, "Hold that fast which thou hast," the question naturally arises, What have we that we are bidden to hold fast? What are the blessings which

we are warned to take heed that we do not lose ?

They may be described as twofold.
i. First, the blessings which were made over to us, when we were first admitted into the fold of Christ—our baptismal blessings. These were,

1. A living union with Christ, into whose body we were then engrafted. This was the fountain and source of all the rest. For whatsoever blessings we possess, pertaining to life and godliness, are ours in Him. We were made one with Christ, and Christ one with us.

2. We were washed in the blood of Christ from all our sins ; and thenceforward, if only we continue in the faith, and abide in that blessed fellowship into which we were then admitted, there is full and free forgiveness for us, even though we should have been so unhappy as again to fall into sin, on our sincere repentance and application to God for pardon in Christ's name. This is what St. John intends, when he says, " My little children, these things write I unto you—(referring to his declaration of God's readiness to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness)—that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advo-

cate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sins*.” And this is also what our Lord appears to have meant, when He said to Peter, “He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit^b,” that is, the efficacy of that first great cleansing continues to the end, provided that we maintain it by having continual recourse to the fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, to wash off whatsoever fresh guilt has been contracted in our passage through a world lying in wickedness.

3. A third blessing, proceeding, like the last mentioned, from our union with Christ, was the gift of the Holy Spirit, given us for the purpose of conforming us to our Lord’s image, and enabling us to mortify and subdue sin, and grow in holiness. If we cherish the influences of this blessed Being, and yield ourselves obediently to His good motions, the life of grace within us will become stronger and more vigorous; if we resist those influences, and refuse to follow those good motions, that life will decay and waste away, and gradually become extinct.

4. A fourth blessing which became ours,

* 1 John ii. 1, 2.

^b 1 John xiii. 10.

on our admission into the Christian Covenant, was a right and title, through Christ, to the heavenly inheritance. We were made inheritors of the kingdom of heaven; insomuch that if we do not forfeit what was then given us, but continue in the enjoyment of our Christian birthright, heaven shall one day assuredly be ours.

Such then, to speak summarily, are the blessings with which God's abounding mercy in Christ hath enriched us; such are the blessings which we have, unless we have even now lost them, and which we are bid to hold fast.

But they are not the whole of those blessings: at least in every case they are not the whole. For

ii. In many instances Christians have made a good use of the grace given them, and have traded successfully with the talents entrusted to them, so that though they are not more one with Christ than they were at the outset, nor more cleansed from the guilt of sin, nor more justified, for none of these admit of degrees, yet they are more under the influence of the Holy Spirit, more sanctified, more holy, more conformed to Christ, more fit for the enjoyment of heaven.

This then is another blessing which some Christians, at least, have ; and which they who have are bidden to hold fast. They are to keep, and keep safely, not only what was given them at the first, but what, by God's grace, they have since acquired.

And now, my brethren, again I ask, How does the case stand with us ? Are we holding fast what we once had, whether what was given us at the first, or what we have acquired since ? By what signs may we know ?

There are some signs, I do not say of a declining state of religion, but of far-gone and deep declension, so plain, that there can scarcely be need even to mention them. What, for example, can be thought of the condition of those who live in the neglect of prayer and the other means of grace ; who allow themselves in the practice of known sins ; in the neglect of known duties ; who come, in any wise, under the Apostle's description, where he tells the Corinthians, that " neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, . . . nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God " ? Surely

* 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10.

these have lost all hold of the heavenly crown, all hope of the inheritance which Christ died to purchase for us. They are to be exhorted, not to hold that fast which they have, (for what have they but ruin and the prospect of everlasting misery ?) but to raise themselves in good earnest and with all their might, or rather to pray God to raise them, from their fallen state. Thank God, bad as their case is, it is not yet past hope. There is still mercy for them, if they will but seek it; there is still grace for them, if they will but ask for it. But they must lose no time. Here is another year closing upon them. How many more years they may have to look forward to,—indeed, how many more months, or weeks, or even days; for, it may be, days should be the measure to reckon by,—who can tell? And let them remember, the longer they delay their repentance, the harder it will be. It is harder, now the year is closing, than it was twelve months ago, when it began: and it will be harder still twelve months hence; though truly twelve months hence their day of grace may be closed for ever.

But to turn to those who are not so manifestly fallen from God's blessed ways;

to those whose case may seem to admit of some doubt, whether they are still holding fast what they once had, or are losing their hold, these marks, and such as these which I am going to mention, will serve to shew how matters really stand.

1. First, do they find a growing carelessness and indifference about the means of grace? About prayer, for instance? I will not suppose that they have given up prayer. This would be so plain a sign of defection and falling away from God, that it would, at once, place those whom it characterizes in the class above spoken of. But is prayer becoming an irksome, wearisome duty; observed, indeed, for form's sake, and for custom's sake, but without interest? No pains taken with it? No earnestness and fervency in it? There was a time, perhaps, when it was otherwise with them; when it was a real comfort to them to retire by themselves at their accustomed hour, and seek and obtain communion with their heavenly Father. There was a time, perhaps, when their first impulse in trouble, or anxiety, or perplexity, was to go and spread their sorrows and cares before God. Now, they are indifferent about any such

means of consolation and direction. They betake themselves to other comforters and other advisers.

So also with regard to the reading of God's word. Once, they took delight in the employment. If they could not say to the full what David says, "O how I love thy law; it is my meditation all the day," yet they could say it in measure. They did love God's law; they did take pleasure in reading the holy book. Never a day passed but they read it; and when they read it, it was with prayer to God to open it to them, and to give them grace to walk in the way it marked out for them to walk in. Now, perhaps, it is read for form's sake; more as a set task, than from a real sense of duty and with pleasure mingled with holy fear. Nay, it may be, it is laid aside in a great measure, on the plea that there is not time for it: whereas formerly, with perhaps fully as much to occupy them, they always contrived to find time every day somehow or other. But there was a will then, and therefore there was a way; now, there is no way, because there is no will.

There is so close a connexion between the different means of grace, one with

another, that no man can become remiss in one, but he is sure to become remiss in the rest also. With prayer and the reading of God's word, public worship will be sure to come in for its share of neglect.

And here also there is a painful contrast between what was once, and what now is, the case. Formerly, they took delight in coming up to the house of the Lord. Nothing would have kept them away but illness or some other urgent cause. And when they came, they strove to improve the privilege granted them; they took pains to prepare their hearts beforehand, and to watch over their hearts, and keep them with all diligence, while here, both in joining in the prayers, and in listening to God's word read and preached. But now, they take little or no pains in these matters: they come hither without previous prayer; they suffer their thoughts to wander as they list during the service; and they return home without benefit. It may be they have advanced a step farther; they have grown remiss and irregular in their attendance; trifling excuses are suffered to keep them away, which once would not have weighed with them for an instant. And

what is a worse sign still, they can stay away, when they do stay away, without uneasiness.

And it is the same with regard to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It was once their custom to partake of it whenever they had opportunity. Now, they are often absent from the holy table; perhaps have given up attending altogether; or, if they still attend, it is not with the awful, reverential, feeling which they once had; it is not with the care to prepare their hearts which they once exercised: they come formally; and they return without profit, and with the sense of guilt increased instead of diminished.

Now, my dear brethren, judge, I pray you, impartially and honestly, whether the signs which I have mentioned, and such as these, do not betoken a declining state of religion? and then let each ask himself, How far do they apply to my own case?

2. But I pass on to another class of signs, but a class intimately connected with the one we have been considering, inasmuch as it is its natural consequence. Neglect of the means of grace is followed by weakness and poverty of grace. And this

is evidenced by the increasing prevalence of evil tempers and corrupt habits. The world, the flesh, and the devil, which were once solemnly renounced, and which it is the Christian's business to strive against and keep under every day he lives, are gaining instead of losing ground in the soul.

The world, for instance : We know how the Christian ought to live in regard to the world. He is to be in the world, and yet not of the world. He is to be in it as a sojourner, as one who has come to tarry for a time ; but not as one who has come to take up his abode in it. His home is above : and that home is to have the first place in his thoughts and affections. And whatever would interfere with his hope of reaching it, or with his preparation for it, is to give way at once. And thus it will be increasingly, if the Christian is really growing in grace. He will not affect indeed to despise the world ; or to be above providing for his maintenance and support and that of his family, while he is in it :—(it is no part of religion to aim at any such attainments : on the contrary, religion teaches us to be industrious and diligent in our proper callings :)—but he will strive to be above

anxiety, and, while he endeavours to maintain himself and his family, to cast all his care upon his heavenly Father, in the assurance that his heavenly Father careth both for him and them. And if, in any instance, he is tempted to seek to get forward by unfair and unjustifiable means, he will at once resist the temptation, knowing that this would be to sin against God, over and above the distrustfulness of such a course.

A man must have declined far indeed, who can allow himself deliberately to break God's laws, in whatsoever respect, or under whatsoever pretext, with a view to his worldly advantage,—at least, what he thinks such, for it will not really prove such in the end, he may rest assured:—for instance, if he can allow himself to cheat, or in any other way to take an unfair advantage, or to break the sabbath that he may get gain: but, short of this, there may be such a growing worldliness of mind, as shall prove that grace is decreasing, and that the cares of this world, even if there be not the deceitfulness of riches, are choking the good seed of the word, and rendering it more and more unfruitful. There may be an eagerness and over-anxiety about his provision

in life, and about his prospects ; there may be a grudging of help to those who are in want, when he has it in his power to relieve them ; a backwardness to deeds of charity generally, as though he would reserve all he has for himself and his family ; such as shall prove too plainly, that the world is gaining more and more upon his affections, and heaven and its glories fading more and more from his view.

Again, the true Christian spirit will prompt a man to be zealous for God and His cause, and will make him take a lively interest in the diffusion of true religion. He will be grieved at the wickedness which he sees around him, and he will do what in him lies to check it ; he will be anxious to see religion flourish both at home and abroad ; and he will strive both by his prayers and by his exertions to advance it ; and, if he is really growing in grace, these feelings will increase, and his exertions will increase with his feelings. But, if he is declining in grace, it will be the contrary. He will be becoming more and more absorbed in himself and his own affairs ; and he will be taking less and less interest in the cause of God and religion, and in the

spiritual welfare of others. And, I am sure I need not add, his peace and happiness will be decreasing in the same proportion.

In these ways, then, to mention no others, the world is gaining ground in those hearts in which grace is declining.

And the flesh, we may rest assured, is gaining ground together with it: for they are inseparable companions.

Where the divine life is prospering in the soul, there is a perpetual watch kept over the heart and its affections. God has given us various desires and emotions, which, as He gave them, were all meant for good, as they are all capable of being turned to good, and made to contribute both to His glory and to our welfare. But sin has broken the harmony of God's original work; and all is now, as man is born into the world, confusion and disorder. It is the object of Divine grace to bring back the state of things, which God at first designed; to restore man to the image of God; to create him anew in the likeness of his Creator. And, where Divine grace is flourishing in the soul, this blessed work of restoration is going forward; the passions are kept in subjection, the temper is go-

verned, the desires are regulated. Not that this is effected without a struggle; nor, indeed, in any case perfectly effected, while the Christian remains on earth. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit," as the Apostle tells us, "and the spirit against the flesh;" but yet the flesh is growing weaker and weaker; the spirit stronger and stronger.

But where grace is declining, it is the contrary. There, the spirit is growing weaker and weaker, and the flesh stronger and stronger. Evil tempers are not resisted; evil thoughts are not restrained; evil desires are not denied; anger is becoming more and more predominant with one, pride with another, a discontented, murmuring spirit with another, a censorious, fault-finding spirit with another, sloth with another, according to the different temptations to which each is liable.

By these marks then, and such as these, if they be present, we may know too surely that the flesh is prevailing and gaining strength, instead of being renounced and crucified according to our baptismal vow.

And where the world and the flesh are prevailing, is it possible that the devil should

not be prevailing also? No, he is too watchful, too active an enemy to let any such opportunity escape him. Indeed, he himself has been mainly instrumental in bringing matters to their present crisis. He first furnished the temptations, and then stirred up and fanned into a flame the evil passions, unholy desires, or unruly tempers, which wanted nothing but fit fuel on which to spend themselves; and when the blaze was once kindled, he spared no pains to keep it burning.

Again I ask then, and let each seriously put the question to himself, How does the case stand with us? This I will venture to say, that whatever was the true answer to the question which concerned the means of grace, the same will be the true answer to the question which concerns the world, the flesh, and the devil. According to the signs given by our use or neglect of the former, will be the signs given by the mortification or the prevalence of those grand enemies of our souls. If we are increasing in our love for the means of grace, and in our care to improve them rightly, then are we increasing in our power to subdue and keep under the world, the flesh,

and the devil. If we are decreasing in our love for the means of grace, and are becoming more and more negligent in the use and improvement of them, then, I may say confidently, the world, the flesh, and the devil are gaining ground, and waxing stronger and stronger, day by day. So that, take the signs either singly or together, we are still brought to the same conclusion.

And now, my brethren, does conscience testify against any that they are not holding fast what they once had, that religion is not flourishing with them, but, on the contrary, is drooping and declining? Let me warn such, in God's name, that they lose no time in retracing their steps, and in stopping the progress of the evil. Every day they delay, they only make the work more difficult. The very indisposition they feel to set about it is not the least alarming of their symptoms. It will grow upon them, if it is not struggled against at once, till, at length, unless by a miracle of God's mercy, which they have no right to expect, they become dead to all religious impressions.

Do any ask, what they must do? They must return to God instantly, confessing

their sins, mourning over their departure from Him, and earnestly beseeching Him to pardon them for Christ's sake ; and not only to pardon them, but to restore to them His good Spirit, which they have so grievously resisted. Thus, prayer must be the first step ; and to prayer must be added the diligent use of all the other means of grace. Declension began by the neglect of these, it must be stayed by attention to them. Let time be redeemed daily, with jealous care, for prayer and the devout study of God's word ; let God's house receive them regularly among its stated worshippers ; let no idle and frivolous excuses avail to keep them away. And when they come, let them labour to improve the opportunity afforded them to the utmost, by preparing their hearts beforehand, and watching over them throughout the service. And let the Lord's Table welcome them among its accustomed guests, and that not as formal attendants, but in real earnestness and devotion of heart, as those who long to enjoy communion with their Lord, and, in Him, first with the Father, and then with their brethren.

And to diligence in the use of the various

means of grace, must be added energy and watchfulness in struggling against the world, the flesh, and the devil. St. Paul gives us directions for our management of this warfare with one of these enemies, and, in that one, virtually with them all, in the last chapter of his Epistle to the Ephesians. He bids us take unto ourselves the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. "Stand, therefore," he continues, "having your loins girt about with truth; and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints*."

Need I assure you, that this course, adopted and persevered in, will, with God's blessing, and that we cannot doubt of, infallibly lead those back into the ways

* Ephes. vi. 13—18.

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of godliness, who have declined from them ;
and as infallibly keep those in them, who
are now walking in them ?

SERMON V.

THE DANGERS INCIDENT TO PROSPERITY.

Preached in August, 1842.

JER. xlviii. 11.

Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.

THESE words occur in a prophecy denouncing heavy judgments upon the people of Moab. They shew how these judgments came to be deserved. Moab had been "at ease from his youth;" his course throughout had been one of uninterrupted prosperity. Other nations (the Israelites, for example) had had their reverses and changes of fortune; but Moab had known nothing of these. He had "settled upon his lees, he had not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither had he gone into captivity." As the natural consequence of such a state of things, he was full of pride, and carnal

confidence, and arrogant contempt of God and His people ; or, to use the prophet's figure, " his taste remained in him, and his scent was not changed." He was as wicked and perverse as ever. This drew down at length the heavy judgments of which the prophet speaks.

We little know, my brethren, what we wish for, when we desire to be free from trials. Few men can bear up against the evil influence of a long course of prosperity. Our Lord said, " How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God ?" And no doubt the same holds of all manner of worldly goods. Their tendency is universally to unfit for heaven. This is a truth very necessary to be kept in mind under all circumstances : if we are prospering, that we may be warned against the dangers incident to prosperity ; if we are in affliction, that we may see a Father's merciful and gracious hand in afflicting us, and may set ourselves to extract sweetness out of the bitter.

It shall be my endeavour, with God's blessing, to enlarge upon these considerations : to shew, at length, that the tendency of a long course of prosperity is to estrange

men from God ; the tendency of the contrary state, that is, of trials and afflictions, to bring them nigh unto Him. God grant us His blessing, and teach us to turn the subject to good account.

But let us understand rightly what is meant by Prosperity. Perhaps some may be disposed to think, that none are to be considered prosperous but such as have a large share of this world's riches. But this is not the case. The prophet's description of Moab does not necessarily imply any extraordinary measure of riches. All it implies is freedom from severe afflictions. " Moab hath been at ease from his youth : " he hath had no heavy trials to trouble him.

The prosperity we speak of, then, is simply freedom from severe afflictions. Of course, extreme poverty and want are inconsistent with it ; so is severe sickness ; so is the loss of children, or of other near and dear relatives ; so is spiritual sorrow, such as God sometimes sends into men's hearts, setting their sins in array before them, and weighing down their spirits under the apprehension of His just displeasure. They who are suffering under these, or any other heavy calamities or afflictions, are not in the

circumstances of which the prophet speaks; they are not "at ease." The persons referred to are such, whether rich or poor, as have been enjoying a long season of freedom from severe trials. Trials they have had no doubt, (for what man is exempt from trials for a single week?) but not severe trials. They have had nothing to alarm them very greatly, or perplex them; nothing, in a word, to shake them out of the easy and quiet state in which they have been living. And of this description of persons there are many in every parish; no doubt there are many amongst ourselves.

Now the passage we have read is a warning to us, that such a state is, in itself, unfavourable to religion. A religious man, so circumstanced, needs to be very much upon his guard, very watchful over himself, or he will hardly maintain his ground: and one who has never attended to religion before, is hardly likely to attend to it while in such circumstances.

We have indeed only to look around us, and we shall see proof enough, even before we enter into particulars, that the case is such as has been described. How few there are among those who have known little or

nothing of affliction, who are eminent for Christian attainments! Nay, how large a proportion of such persons shew too plainly, by the whole tenour of their lives and conversations, that, beyond the outward form, they are strangers to religion altogether! Whereas, on the other hand, how rarely do we meet with one, eminent in Christian attainments, who has not been tried in the furnace of affliction, and chastened in the school of adversity!

But to proceed to particulars: I will endeavour to shew, in sundry instances, the tendency of a long course of prosperity, to keep men at a distance from God.

1. And first, it is the obvious tendency of such a state of things to make us content to have our portion here. Where the present life has so many things that are pleasant, so few that are painful, it requires no ordinary measure of faith to look beyond and live above it. "O death," exclaims the Son of Sirach, "how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions, unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things!" Such a one sees heaven and the joys of heaven (if indeed he sees them

at all, or thinks of them at all) only at a distance, glimmering, as it were, beyond the dark cold grave. What are these, compared with enjoyments actually in possession?

Afflictions, on the other hand, serve to detach us from the love of this world. They are like a bitter medicine, rubbed upon the breasts of our natural mother, to wean us from them, that we may turn to fitter food. "O death," exclaims again the writer just now quoted, "acceptable is thy sentence unto the needy, and unto him whose strength faileth, that is now in the last age, and is vexed with all things, and to him that despaireth, and hath lost patience".^a A man may not, for all this, set his affections on heaven. Indeed, it is a painful truth often forced upon a clergyman's thoughts, while attending upon the sick and dying, that many a one is weary of life, and longs for death, who yet, to all appearance, has small reason to hope for a happier state after death. But, at any rate, one obstacle to the desire of a better world is taken away. The afflicted person is brought into the condition of those to whom the Saviour's gracious invitation^b is directly addressed:

^a Eccclus. xli. 1, 2.

^b Matt. xi. 28—30.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” And he is, humanly speaking, more likely to accept it, than those who scarcely feel that they have any concern in it.

2. Another tendency of prosperity is to make us self-dependent, as though we could do without God, and need not trouble ourselves to apply to Him. For example, I would ask any one who has for years enjoyed uninterrupted health, Are you deeply conscious that this health has been God’s gift ? Do you acknowledge it as such in your daily thanksgivings and prayers, heartily praising God for it, and earnestly imploring the continuance of it ? Perhaps the time may come, when you shall be laid upon a bed of sickness, and wearisome nights shall be measured out to you, when you will wonder, if you do not now, that you could have lived so long in the enjoyment of such great blessings, and yet have had so little thought of the hand which gave them. The same may be said of the use

of our reason. I remember hearing of a question which a lunatic once put to a person, who was being shewn over the lunatic asylum in which he was confined: "Sir," he said, "did you remember to thank God this morning for the use of your reason?" Which of us, my brethren, has remembered to do this this morning? I suspect the most of us live, as though this great and blessed gift were so completely part and parcel of ourselves that we need be at no trouble about it. O what earnest prayers for its continuance would be stirred up, if we were in danger of losing it, and at the same time sensible of that danger! What heartfelt thanksgivings for its restoration, if it had been restored after having been withdrawn! Take again the case of family blessings. While these are poured down upon a household in an uninterrupted stream, while the different members of the family are living together in affectionate harmony, and in the enjoyment of health and other worldly goods, how apt are they to forget the Giver, and to receive what they have as things of course! But let sickness or death enter among them, or any other heavy calamity, which may disturb their peace and mar their happi-

ness, they will then learn to view these blessings in another light. The same may be said of blessings bestowed on a still larger scale. Deeply thankful this whole nation has cause to be for the abounding harvest wherewith God has blessed us. And yet how few among us distinctly recognise God's hand in it, and acknowledge His goodness. Deeply thankful too for the long years of uninterrupted peace which our country has enjoyed, peace from without, peace within, peace abroad, peace at home; but how little has it been recollected, in most instances, that we owe it to God, and that we are dependent upon Him for its continuance? May this good effect at least result from the troubles of which the report has reached us within the last few days, that we may be made to feel and acknowledge our dependence upon God for national mercies.

The history of the Jewish people, as set before us in Scripture, is one continuous exemplification of this tendency of prosperity to make men forget God, and live as though they were independent of Him. When all things went well with them, they invariably fell away from Him. This drew

down His chastisement. Then they humbled themselves, and turned and sought after Him. In their affliction they sought Him early^c. Again He withdrew His hand, and restored them to His favour, and scattered blessings around their path; and again they revolted and went astray. Such was their course throughout.

3. Another tendency of prosperity is to make us proud. It checks that brokenness of heart and contrition, which are of so great price in God's esteem. "Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked^d." And such is the history of most who have had a long season of prosperity. It is a rare thing to find a man, who has been surrounded for years with worldly blessings, with little intermixture of trials, who yet remains truly humble. There are exceptions no doubt: but they are not many. And as prosperity tends to make us devoid of humility and contrition in our deportment towards God, so does it likewise tend to make us arrogant and overbearing in our behaviour towards men. The great persecutors of the Church were for the most part drunken with prosperity. Whereas, on the contrary, trials and afflictions tend,

^c Hosea v. 15.

^d Deut. xxxii. 15.

under God's blessing, to soften a man's spirit, to make him lowly towards God, meek and gentle towards men, and especially towards those who are in trouble.

4. I shall mention but one other tendency of prosperity,—its tendency to make a man unthankful, and insensible to God's mercies. This may seem strange at first sight, and a sad proof it is of the depravity of our nature : but it is most true, that, for the most part, men's thankfulness is in no wise proportioned to the reason they have for thankfulness ; too often, it is almost the reverse. No doubt there are some instances of deep and abiding thankfulness among the prosperous ; but I suspect there are many more among the afflicted. Indeed, experience shews that affliction is the soil on which thankfulness flourishes best. And I suppose most of us who have observed what goes on around us must have noticed, that the persons, within their range of observation, most eminent for a thankful spirit, have ordinarily been persons who have been sorely tried with adversity.

These particulars will be enough to illustrate what was before stated in the general, that a long course of prosperity is unfriendly

to religion. I proceed to apply the subject to two classes of persons ; first, those who are in prosperity ; secondly, those who are in affliction.

1. Is prosperity, my brethren, so unfavourable to the divine life ? How great need then have those who are placed in such circumstances to be on their guard ! especially how watchful against such evil tendencies as have been particularized ! O let us take heed, if the world is smiling upon us, and we are surrounded with a large share of earthly blessings, lest we put the gifts in the Giver's place and make idols of them, so turning what in reality God designed as blessings into curses. Let us take heed, lest we be content to have our portion here, and forget, or slight, our heavenly inheritance. It would be sad for a man, who was on his journey home after a long absence in a foreign land, to be so taken up with the accommodations of an inn in a strange place, as to think no more of his home and his family. Yet sadder far, if that inn were this present life, and that home heaven. Let us take heed too of forgetting God in the midst of His benefits, take heed of receiving them as matters of course. Let not that be

true of us, which has been true of numbers, that whereas, in our adversity, we were earnest in our prayers, and hearty in our thanksgivings, when the day of prosperity comes, we grow cold, and listless, and formal, ready almost to doubt God's interposition in past deliverances, and to put down our once thankful and glowing thoughts to the score of excited and enthusiastic feeling. Let us take heed too and beware of pride. Pride is one of those evil weeds which spring up naturally in the hearts of all of us, and nothing but the most assiduous care, assisted by God's grace, can keep it down. Prosperity has an especial tendency to foster it. All have need to watch and pray against it, but the prosperous especially. Let us endeavour to check the very first risings of this unholy spirit, whether it take the form of rebellion against God, or arrogance and overbearing towards men. Once more, let us be on our guard against unthankfulness; let us cultivate a thankful spirit. Sad indeed will it be, if the more cause we have for thankfulness, the less we be thankful. Let thanksgiving have a large share in our daily devotions; let us be full and particular in our mention of the mercies

which we have to acknowledge; let them be often in our thoughts, often on our lips, and let us seek continually to maintain our sense of them by *acts* of grateful obedience. Diligence in doing God's will is one of the best and surest means of keeping up the spirit of thankfulness. I would add but one suggestion more on this head. If we would successfully guard against the dangers incident to prosperity, let us endeavour to lead a life of continual mortification and self-denial. I do not mean by inventing penances, and seeking about for self-imposed austerities. We have no need to go out of our way. The common duties of daily life will find us scope sufficient. Only let us see that we do not shrink from the cross, and allow ourselves in those indulgences with which a state of prosperity is sure to tempt us. We are Christ's soldiers, and we must be prepared to endure hardship.

2. I would say in conclusion a few words to those who are in trouble. We have seen enough, I think, to convince us, that a state of uninterrupted prosperity is the reverse of being favourable to religion. It follows, that trials and afflictions, however bitter in the enduring, may be among our

choicest blessings. Certain it is, that many a man has cause to praise God that ever he was afflicted. Many a man owes it to affliction, under God, that he first gave his mind to serious thoughts. Many a man owes it to affliction, under God, that he has been kept in the good way when he has entered upon it, or has been brought back when he has wandered from it. Let these considerations be your comfort under your trials. Let them lead you to see a Father's hand, the hand of a loving Father, in these severe dispensations. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." But remember, affliction will not accomplish its work of itself. You must work with it. You must be on the watch to turn it to good account. The worst affliction of all is an affliction lost. Let it lead you to self-examination, that you may learn why God thus deals with you; let it lead you to confession of your sins, humiliation, and self-abasement; let it lead you to prayer. So shall you learn to bless God for His chastisements, and to say with David, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word^e."

^e Ps. cxix. 67.

SERMON VI.

EARNESTNESS IN PRAYER: JACOB WRESTLING
WITH THE ANGEL.

Preached on the first Sunday in Lent.

GEN. xxxii. 26.

I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.

IT is one blessed effect of affliction, when sanctified, that it leads us to God. Many a one would have gone on all his days the servant of sin and Satan, living to the world, and seeking his happiness here below, if troubles had not come upon him, and made him sensible of the folly of his conduct. And many a one, who has entered upon the heavenward course, would have gone back again, or, at the best, would have advanced with a slow and loitering pace, if God had not sent trials to quicken his steps. We all need to be shewn the emptiness and unsatisfactoriness of earthly goods; we all need to be reminded, that

our home is above; we all need to be taught, that we are in ourselves weak and helpless, and unable to contend against our enemies. These benefits afflictions work out for us when they are rightly received: they arouse us to look around for some surer and firmer ground, on which to build for happiness; they make us see, and feel as well as see, how utterly weak we are, when left to ourselves; and they drive us to prayer, and constrain us to betake ourselves to God, and to wait upon Him with a seriousness, earnestness, and perseverance, which otherwise, perhaps, we should never have known.

The truth of these observations is signally illustrated by that part of Jacob's history, which is related in the chapter from which the text is taken. Jacob's life had for many years, as far as we know, passed away without any great trials. He had been gradually growing rich and prosperous, and had had little to arouse and quicken him. But within the last few days, dangers had gathered round him like thunder clouds in a summer's sky. Laban had pursued after him with a heart full of revengeful thoughts; and he had scarcely escaped from Laban,

before he found himself in still greater peril from the hands of Esau. We learn, in the early part of the chapter, how the sense of his danger and the consciousness of his weakness impelled him to prayer as his grand resource. Here we have the same result again. We behold him engaged, the livelong night, in earnest and persevering supplication. The subject before us indeed is no other than that mysterious conflict in which he wrestled with the angel, and in which, as a prince, he had power with God, and prevailed. I will first recapitulate the whole account, as it is set down in the sacred volume, and then, with God's help, gather out of it such practical considerations, as it seems fairly to suggest.

The time was fast approaching, when the meeting which Jacob looked forward to with so much anxiety must take place. Night was drawing on : the next morning, in all probability, his brother would come in sight. Jacob had taken every precaution in his power. His last employment had been to remove his family over the brook, on the banks of which they had rested, that they might be ready to proceed on their journey the following day. This done, he retired

to spend the night in supplication and prayer. Then, continues the inspired historian, "Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh: and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? and he blessed him there. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

Such is the account given us. It is impossible to avoid the thought, that there must be much that is deeply important contained in it. God was not wont to manifest Himself, even in that age of the world, as He was here manifesting Himself, on

ordinary or trifling occasions. One reason probably, why the history has been handed down, is that the origin of the name *Israel*, a name thenceforward to be so highly honoured, might be kept on record. But we may readily believe, that the circumstances, which led to the giving of that name, were themselves likewise worthy to be carefully pondered.

There are three questions, which may be asked :

1. What was the nature of the conflict in which Jacob was engaged ?

2. Who was the mysterious Person with whom he wrestled ?

3. What was the whole transaction intended to teach ?

1. There can be no question but that the conflict was a real one. Not a syllable is said which implies the contrary. The narrative, from beginning to end, speaks of what actually took place, not of what merely seemed to take place. And moreover, Jacob carried about with him, it would appear, for some time afterwards, a sensible memorial, that it was no mere visionary struggle in which he had been engaged ; for the hollow of his thigh was put out of joint, and the

next morning, as he passed over Peniel, to go forward on his journey, he still felt the effects of the lameness which had been caused.

But it may be asked further, Was it merely an outward and visible struggle? Was it only bodily strength that was called into action? It was this; but it was more also. It was a struggle of Prayer. For so the prophet Hosea, who refers to the passage before us, expressly declares: "Jacob by his strength had power with God: yea, he had power over the Angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him*."

2. Another question which naturally occurs is, Who was the mysterious Being, with whom Jacob wrestled? Jacob himself made the enquiry? "Tell me," said he, "I pray thee, what is thy name?" He received no direct answer; but the very next verse shews that he was not left in doubt: "He called the name of the place Peniel, (that is, the face of God,) for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." It was God then who had condescended to appear to His servant—God in the likeness of man, even the second Person in the sacred

* Hosea xii. 3, 4.

and blessed Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is that divine Being, who, from time to time, manifested Himself in human form to the saints of the Old Testament. Sometimes He is called "a man," as here in verse 24, "There wrestled a man with Jacob until the breaking of the day;" sometimes "an angel," as the prophet Hosea describes Him in the passage above referred to, "He had power over the angel, and prevailed;" but at other times His true nature shines out, and He stands revealed before us, the everlasting God, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

3. The third question is, What was this transaction designed to teach? One lesson probably was a lesson of encouragement, for Jacob's especial use. It was to assure him beforehand that God would deliver him from his brother. He who had wrestled with God and prevailed, could not have real cause to be afraid of man.

It is obvious, however, that there must have been a far deeper and fuller meaning than this. Jacob was the father and representative of the Jewish Church, and, in that, of the Christian Church, of which it was the germ. He was also very eminently a type

of Christ. When therefore we read of his wrestling with the angel, of his having power with God and prevailing, and, in token of his success, of his name being changed to Israel, the name which was thenceforward to designate his literal, and also, figuratively, his spiritual descendants, we may well believe, that there was shadowed forth the favour, which, in the first instance, the Jewish people, and afterwards the Church of Christ, should enjoy at God's hands. And if, in the case of the Jewish people, this favour was, as we are expressly told, for their fathers' sake, how much more, in the case of Christ's Church, for Christ's sake? Yes, it was Christ, who, in truth and fulness, was a Prince with God, and, as a Prince, had power with Him, and prevailed. Nor is it at all a valid objection to this view, that the divine Person, with whom Jacob wrestled, is the same whom he typically represented. Hear, however, in what manner the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews describes, if we may so call it, our Lord's earnest wrestling with His Father; a passage which bears so striking a resemblance to the one under our consideration, that whoever compares the two together, especially bear-

ing in mind the prophet Hosea's words, will hardly doubt but that Jacob's conflict eminently prefigured the conflict of Christ: "Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared; though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, (i. e. when all that He had come to do and to suffer was fulfilled,) He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him^b." Here, there are four distinct points of resemblance: First, The prophet Hosea says of Jacob, that "he wept, and made supplication to the angel:" the apostle says of Christ, that He "offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death." Secondly, We read of Jacob, that, "as a prince he had power with God, and prevailed:" we read of Christ, that "He was heard in that He feared." Thirdly, Jacob, though he prevailed, yet prevailed not without suffering; his thigh was out of joint, while he wrestled with the angel:

^b Heb. v. 7—9.

and, in like manner, Christ, though He prevailed, was yet not made perfect, did not accomplish the object, for which He had come down to earth, without suffering, “yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.” And the marks of His suffering, there is reason to believe, will be visible through all eternity in that glorified body, with which, for our sakes, He has clothed himself. Fourthly, Jacob’s blessing passed on from himself to his children, and his children’s children: “Because the Lord loved thy fathers,” (these were Moses’ words to the Israelites in after times,) “therefore He chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in His sight with His mighty power out of Egypt, to drive out nations from before thee, greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day^c.” In like manner, Christ’s blessing passed on to His people: “He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.” Whoever considers these points of resemblance, will scarcely fail to acknowledge, that, in this mysterious transaction, there was shadowed forth beforehand a far

^c Deut. iv. 37, 38.

more wonderful and more important conflict. A greater than Jacob was here.

But it is time that we go on to draw forth from the passage before us such practical instruction as it suggests.

1. And first, we are reminded of the way in which it behoves the Christian to prepare for trials. Already, in the morning of that eventful day, had Jacob been upon his knees to commend himself and his affairs to God. After that, his time had been abundantly occupied in making the necessary arrangements for the interview to which he was looking forward. And now, when the labours of the day were over, and we should have expected to see him betaking himself to rest, we find him again employed in prayer and supplication, alone with his God. Who could doubt the result, when he saw Jacob setting so much store by prayer? If there be one sign, which, more than any other, is an infallible token that some great blessing is at hand, it is this,—when prayer is highly valued, when it is resorted to as our grand resource, and persevered in with the assurance that it shall not be offered in vain.

The obvious lesson taught us by Jacob's conduct is the importance of setting apart and securing time for special prayer, when we are about to enter into circumstances of difficulty or danger; indeed, we may say, into any new circumstances which are likely to be accompanied by trials, or to affect our future course in life. Is it too much to say, that no Christian ever attained to eminence in religious attainments, who neglected to observe this practice? We read of the first disciples observing it in several instances in the Acts; and we have a higher example than theirs, even that of our blessed Lord. We are told, that the evening before He chose and set apart His twelve Apostles, the foundation stones on which He was afterwards to build His Church, He retired unto a mountain, "and continued all night in prayer to God^d." And His retirement into the wilderness, when He was tempted of Satan, had surely this object in view, that He might fit Himself for the conflict in which He was to be engaged.

And let us not think, that the occasions for such special prayer are of such rare occurrence, as to happen only once or twice

^d Luke vi. 12.

in a man's lifetime. No year can pass over us, without affording some of them ; for no year passes, without bringing with it trials to be undergone, and duties to be performed, of more than common importance, and therefore needing more than common preparation. Rest assured, some such occasions are yet in store for each of us in what remains of this present year ; occasions which may recal to our minds the subject we are now considering. Yes, there may be occasions, when we shall be constrained to own, that no earthly comforts can sustain us, no earthly comforter support us ; and when we shall be driven to pray with an earnestness and fervency, to which perhaps in ordinary times we are strangers.

It is obvious too to remark upon the importance of endeavouring duly to improve such seasons as that on which we have just entered. We little consider, perhaps, the thoughtfulness and wisdom which the Church has manifested in setting apart times of this description. They serve, or should serve, as remembrancers to her children, while busied and cumbered with the occupations and cares of life, to pause and bethink themselves of that better world, for which

she would train them. Unhappily, they have been abused, (and what good thing has not?) and, as a consequence, in a great measure disregarded; or the name and form retained, while the substance and reality are lost. But we need not be reminded, that it is no part of wisdom to suffer the abuse of what is good to deprive us of its true use. If the saints of the Old Testament, if the saints of the New, if our blessed Lord Himself, found it expedient to retire at times from more active employments, even when those employments were themselves works of charity and benevolence, who are we, that we should be able to go forward in the divine life, without such aids? And shall we value them the less, and expect less good from them, because, instead of being of our own devising, they have been marked out for our observance by the Church, and have ministered to the edification of God's people for successive ages?

There are many among us*, on whom there would seem to be an especial call for more than ordinary diligence in devotional em-

* This paragraph was added on the occasion of the Sermon being preached in the English Church at Funchal, Madeira, in Lent 1839.

poyments. Removed, for a season, from our accustomed occupations; our minds set at liberty from their accustomed cares; having *mementoes* on every side of the frail tenure by which life is held, we are surely bidden, as by a voice from heaven, to seize and improve the opportunity for communing with our own hearts, for studying the holy Scriptures, for being much with our God. Others may say, though indeed it is a vain excuse, and one which will not stand them in stead hereafter, that they have not time for devotional employments. We cannot say so. God grant, my brethren, that when the day comes, in which we shall have to render an account of the talents entrusted to us, we may be able to look back upon this present season, itself surely no small talent, as one, in which, through God's grace preventing and assisting us, we have made marked progress in the divine life, and have increased in meetness for the kingdom of heaven. It will be sad indeed that there should have been so much care and thought for the health of these frail bodies, which at the most can be preserved to us but a few years longer, if at the same time the souls are neglected which must endure for ever.

2. But to return : Jacob's conduct, we have seen, teaches us, on special occasions, to set apart time for special prayer. But it does more. It teaches us how to employ that time, in order that we may pray to good purpose. It is an easy thing to say, I will set apart this hour, or this day, or whatsoever time we design, for devotional employments; but it is another matter to fill up that space, so that no portion of it be lost. What intense earnestness does Jacob's wrestling exhibit ? " He wept, and made supplication." The very action of wrestling conveys the idea of strenuous effort. The eye, the hand, the foot, every muscle of the body is brought into play. In Jacob's case this was eminently so. He continued to struggle throughout the night till the breaking of the day ; and though he was already lamed in the conflict, he still grasped his heavenly antagonist, and refused to loose his hold : " I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

Does it seem a bold transition to pass from this representation to the exercise of prayer ? Alas, I fear to most of us it must seem so. Where is there any thing of this intense earnestness, this unwearied perse-

verance, this holy confidence, in our addresses to the throne of grace, or in our endeavours to lay hold, and keep hold, of eternal life? To some, such urgency would appear little short of enthusiasm. Yet hear how the word of God speaks on this very point. Mark, first, the account of our blessed Saviour's prayer the night before He suffered, (an account, we may observe, which singularly confirms the view which has been taken of the typical reference of Jacob's conflict,) He withdrew from His disciples, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me ; nevertheless not my will but thine be done. And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven strengthening Him. *And, being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly*: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground¹." Surely there is warrant here for all possible earnestness. Or, if we would fain have our example drawn from one on a level with ourselves, take the prayer of the Syrophenician woman, when interceding with our Lord for her daughter: "Have mercy on me," she cried, "O Lord, thou Son

¹ Luke xxii. 42—44.

of David. But Jesus answered her not a word. And His disciples came and besought Him, saying, Send her away, (i. e. grant her her request,) for she crieth after us. But He answered and said, I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she, and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me. But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table⁶. Here is the same earnestness, the same intensity of effort, the same perseverance, which we have seen in Jacob, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

My dear brethren, do we complain, any of us, that we make slow progress in the heavenward course; that our efforts are like the efforts which men make in a dream, continually baffled and without success; that we know little of the peace and joy, of the devotedness, of the conformity to our Lord's image, which it behoves us to aim at, and which we believe some to have attained? Is not the secret reason to be found here—either that we have sought these

⁶ Matt. xv. 22—27.

blessings in our own strength, or, if we have, in some sort, been mindful of the source from whence they are to be expected, that we have not pursued after them with the earnestness and perseverance which they deserve, and which God requires. It is one of the very first principles of religion to know that Christ is the fountain and source of all grace to His people ; that whoever would be strong must be strong in the Lord ; that whoever would be righteous, his righteousness must be of the Lord, seeing that “of God Christ is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” It is in vain therefore that we seek to make progress while we rely on our own strength. It is in vain that we even use the means of grace, unless we look, through and beyond them, to Him who is the fountain of grace.

But again : It is not enough that we acknowledge in theory that Christ is the source of all spiritual blessings to His people. It behoves us further to press after these blessings with seriousness and earnestness. “The kingdom of heaven,” said our Lord, “suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force^h.” “Strive,” (agonize, *wrestle*, it

^h Matt. xi. 12.

might almost be translated,) “to enter in at the strait gateⁱ.” Is there any thing in *our* efforts at all answering to these strong expressions?

But are we sure that such earnest and persevering diligence would in the end prove successful? We have the most certain warrant of Scripture that it would. The issue of Jacob’s conflict would be the issue of ours too. We should have power with God, and prevail. It is very observable how repeatedly, throughout the whole tenour of Scripture, promises are made to prayer, as though God were expressly providing against the unbelief and the indolence to which He foresaw men would be prone in this respect. “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” “If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him^k?” “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him^l.” “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified

ⁱ Luke xiii. 24. ^k Luke xi. 9, 13. ^l James i. 5.

in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it^a." See then the encouragement which God holds out to us. Heaven and happiness, eternal happiness, are placed within our reach. We have but to ask in good earnest, to urge our suit, as Jacob urged his, to hold on, in the way of God's appointment, perseveringly, unwearyedly, and, in the end, we shall assuredly gain our point. Sin shall be forgiven; the Holy Spirit shed abroad in our hearts; the image of Christ formed daily more and more within us, and expressed more and more outwardly in our lives and conversations: and in due time we shall be admitted into God's blissful presence. Our eyes shall see the King in His beauty, we shall behold the land that is very far off. To which God vouchsafe to bring us all of His infinite mercy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

^a John xiv. 13, 14.

SERMON VII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S FINAL TRIUMPH AT THE RESURRECTION.

Preached on Easter Sunday.

EXODUS xiv. 30.

Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore.

YES, there were their enemies, but their might was gone; there were their oppressors, but their oppression was broken; their cruel task-makers, but their tasks were at an end. They lay still and motionless: the wind, perhaps, shook their hair, or the waves shifted their limbs; but never again should they arise to afflict their once persecuted bondsmen. The hands that had wielded the lash, or grasped the sword, were for ever clenched; the tongues that had poured forth scorn, and mockery, and rebuke, were for ever silent. God had wrought for His people a mighty deliverance, and "Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore."

But there is another deliverance which we are this day called upon to commemorate—a deliverance in which we ourselves are most nearly concerned. It was, as on this day, that our Lord, our own blessed and adorable Saviour, burst the bars of the grave, and rose triumphant over His enemies. He had come down from the highest heavens; He had laid aside His glory; He had thrown a veil over his Deity, (and yet the bright effulgence broke out at times notwithstanding;) He had taken upon Him the form of a servant; He had dwelt among us, on this our earth, as a man, a man of sorrows, a very scorn of men, and the outcast of the people. His whole life had been a life of contempt. He had been treated by the Jews as an impostor. He had been brought before their tribunal, and condemned for no other crime than that, as they affirmed, He had pretended to be what indeed He was—the Son of God. He had been delivered over to the Gentiles as a malefactor; and when the Roman governor had condemned Him, in compliance with their importunities, and had set at liberty, as the worthier and better man, a prisoner, who lay charged with a complication of the most atrocious crimes,

—sedition, and robbery, and murder,—he had given Him up into the hands of the rude soldiers; and they had decked Him with the mock insignia of royalty; they had clad Him with a purple robe; crowned Him with a crown, a crown of thorns; put a reed into His hand for a sceptre; and then they had scornfully bowed the knee before Him, and called Him King. And when this scene of insult was at length ended, they had led Him away to that shameful death, which was never awarded except to the meanest and vilest criminals—the death of the cross. And, as if this were not enough, to complete His ignominy, even in His last hours He was numbered with transgressors, and crucified between two thieves. But now an end was put to His sufferings and to His humiliation. On this glorious day, His character was vindicated, and every reproach wiped from His name. He was “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead^a.” “He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His cross^b.” By His death He had “destroyed him who had

^a Rom. i. 4.

^b Coloss. ii. 15.

the power of death^c:" and now God was about "highly to exalt Him, and to give Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father^d."

Even if there had been no connection between Israel of old and ourselves, we could hardly have failed to read with lively interest how innocence was vindicated, and tyranny frustrated of its designs. And if our ever-blessed Lord had been merely some indifferent person amongst our fellow-men, to whom we bore no relation, and with whom we had no bond of union, even in that case we could hardly have failed to rejoice, if we had seen God manifestly interposing in His behalf, and rescuing Him from the malice of His enemies. What then ought to be our feelings, when we consider, that, in the deliverance of the Israelites from the tyranny of Pharaoh, was, if we may so speak, acted over beforehand our own deliverance from the power of the devil; and that in the resurrection of Jesus was wrought

^c Heb. ii. 14.

^d Philip. ii. 9—11.

out our own resurrection; in His triumph over Satan and over the grave, our own triumph over sin and over death! What ought to be our feelings, when we consider, that (so close and intimate is the connexion in which we stand with our Lord) “God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us (hath brought us to life) together with Christ; and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.”

Surely, then, Easter may well be to us, if we are true and faithful to our Lord, a season of especial rejoicing. It reminds us that our beloved and adored Saviour has burst the bars of the grave, and triumphed over His enemies. It reminds us that we ourselves are already, in some degree, partakers of His victory, for we are one with Christ, and Christ with us; we are members of that body of which Christ is the Head. It reminds us that a day is coming, the day of the resurrection, that great Easter-day, when the victory shall be complete; when our Lord, having finally subdued every enemy, shall

• Ephes. ii. 4—6.

go back to heaven in triumph, and, leading with Him His redeemed people, shall present them to His Father, and place them in that blissful land, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary be at rest; where the prisoners rest together, they hear not the voice of the oppressor;" yea, more, where they shall "see their Saviour as He is," and "behold His glory," and dwell in His presence; and, if this be too little, shall "sit with Him on His throne, and reign for ever and ever."

The appointments and the services of our Church have brought before us of late much matter for sorrowful meditation; and I doubt not but that many of us have been endeavouring to profit by the provisions she has made. The Cross of Christ, and the remembrance of his own sinfulness, are subjects which should never be long absent from the Christian's mind. One reason why the most of us make such poor advances in the spiritual life is, that we so seldom or so lightly think of them. But sorrow must not engross all our time and all our thoughts. The Church has her days of feasting as well as her days of mourning; and it is our duty, as well as our privilege, to live much in the

exercise of holy rejoicing. "Rejoice in the Lord always ; again I say, Rejoice^f." But, indeed, here is the secret,—they whose minds are the most fixed upon Christ's sufferings, who have the truest sense and the most deeply felt consciousness of sin, who walk the most humbly with their God, who are the most mortified in their lives, the most ready to take up the cross and follow their Saviour, will ever be the best acquainted with genuine Christian rejoicing. Their very sorrows will be mingled with sweetness and consolation, and their joys will be heightened and increased by their sorrows.

The kind of rejoicing, indeed, at which the Christian aims as his *habitual* temper, is, perhaps, deep and settled peace, rather than overflowing but fitful joy. At such a season as this, however, it is right that he should rise above the ordinary level.

Let us go, then, with the Israelites in imagination ; and, while we survey their enemies dead upon the sea-shore, let us stir up in our hearts thoughts of joy, and praise, and thanksgiving, by beholding, by antici-

^f Phil. iv. 4. The word *again* refers to the same direction given before, c. iii. 1.

pation, our own enemies likewise stretched before our feet.

Of all the bodies which were strewn like sea-weed along the shores of the Red Sea, we may well believe there was one to which the eyes of the Israelites would be especially directed—the body of their grand enemy, their arch-persecutor, the king of the Egyptians. It was Pharaoh who had been the chief cause of their sufferings. It was Pharaoh who had made their lives bitter by reason of their bondage. It was Pharaoh who had hurried after them with his armies to bring them back to Egypt. And now Pharaoh lay a lifeless, helpless corpse. The waves had respected him no more than the meanest of his subjects.

We too have one grand enemy. He is styled “the prince,” “the god,” of this world. We were born his subjects. He seduced our first parents from their allegiance to their lawful sovereign. He persuaded them that they were not as happy as they might be. He promised them liberty, and, lo, they and their posterity, to the most remote generations, became his slaves, and he ruled them with a rod of iron.

But Christ has broken the yoke of the oppressor. Christ has thrown wide the doors of his prison-house. Christ has proclaimed liberty to the captives. We have risen up; we have solemnly renounced our former master; and we have set forth, under the conduct of our rightful Lord, to win our way to the heavenly Canaan. Still, however, Satan pursues. He has ordered out his armies, and he presses us from behind; and innumerable are the stratagems by which he endeavours to bring us once more under his dominion. At times he alarms us, and well nigh drives us to despair. The way of duty seems rugged and impassable. He threatens us with losses in our worldly circumstances. He arrays against us the opposition, or the scorn, or the ridicule, of our fellow-men. And, in addition to these, the fearful falls of some, whom we had looked up to as in every respect our superiors, fill us with apprehension for our own safety. At other times he lays aside the appearance of hostility, invites us with open arms to his bosom, and spreads a thousand enticements before our eyes. There is not a lust in our breasts for which he has not a suitable allurement, nor

a passion for which he has not a suitable incentive. Snares succeed to snares, and temptations to temptations. Like the waves of the sea, no sooner is one past than another approaches. Thus does he seek, by innumerable devices, to win back the captives whom Christ hath rescued from his grasp ; and thus will he continue to press upon their footsteps during the whole course of their earthly pilgrimage. But the sea of death will separate between him and the objects of his pursuit for ever.

Come, then, and view with the eye of faith the deliverance complete. Look forward to the great and glorious day of the resurrection, and stand in thought upon the shores of that mighty continent which stretches onward throughout eternity, and behold the enemy, who has pursued with unmitigable hatred the armies of the living God, at length overthrown and vanquished. Never again shall he shake the spear or prepare the ambush. Never again shall he "go forth to deceive the nations, and to compass the camp of the saints and the beloved city." He shall be "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, and shall be tormented day and night for ever⁵."

⁵ Rev. xx. 10.

Blessed be God, if we have been in any wise true to the high privileges which have been vouchsafed to us, we have already some earnest of this final victory. We are becoming increasingly sensible of Satan's devices, increasingly conscious of our own weakness, increasingly earnest in our applications for the promised aid of the Holy Spirit, and, as a necessary consequence, increasingly successful in the warfare in which we are engaged. Proof we have indeed, most humiliating proof, that we are still in an enemy's country; but there is proof too, that they that are with us are more and mightier than they that are against us.

But let us pass on, and view some of the chief captains in the army of this our enemy.

There is Sin—the Guilt of sin, and the Power of sin. And, first, with regard to the Guilt of sin. Did we live in the full enjoyment of the privileges which have been bestowed upon us, we should, even here, be freed from the sense of guilt, and from the fear of condemnation consequent upon it. In our baptism we were washed from all stains, whether original or actual, previously contracted; and thenceforward, by the con-

tinual exercise of repentance and faith, by abiding in Christ and Christ in us, our hearts are to be kept sprinkled from an evil conscience. This is the glorious liberty to which Christ hath called us, even that, being "in Christ Jesus," we should be free from condemnation; and that, being justified by faith, we should have peace with God; and that, possessing that peace, we should "serve Him, without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our lives"^h.

But have we always been able to maintain this liberty? Have we always been able to come with freedom and confidence into the presence of God, and address Him as our Father? Have not there rather been seasons, in which the Psalmist's words seemed aptly to describe the feelings of our hearts—"Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up. They are more than the hairs of my head; therefore my heart faileth me?" Many Christians have been thus exercised at the approach of death.

But here is our consolation: A day is coming, in which, if only we shall have been enabled to stand fast, to continue in

^h Rom. viii. 1; v. 1. Luke i. 74, 75.

the faith, all fear of condemnation shall be finally and for ever taken away. The consciousness of guilt, indeed, of past guilt, we shall still perhaps, in one sense, retain ; but it will be such a consciousness as will prove a never-failing spring of mingled humility and gratitude—humility at the recollection of our deep unworthiness, and gratitude at the experience of the complete forgiveness, and of the rich and abounding mercies of which we are, and of which throughout eternity we shall be, partakers. So shall good be brought out of evil, and even God's bitterest enemies be made to praise Him.

Again ; there is the Power of sin.

The Christian has two natures within him, the old nature and the new, the flesh and the spirit ; and these are contrary the one to the other ; they keep up a continual warfare : the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. On the one hand, it is his sincere desire to be conformed in all things to the will of God, to be holy in deed, in word, nay, in thought ; on the other, the stubborn and untractable disposition, which led man in the first instance to rebel against his Creator, still dwells within him, and strives for the

mastery. At one time, it takes the form of pride ; at another, of ambition ; at another, of avarice. If these be quelled for a season, then sloth steals upon him, or lust inflames him, or envy wastes, or anger enrages. And again and again he is mortified by finding that evil tempers, or corrupt affections, which he had long thought subdued, or which he had perhaps seen and wondered at, with cold surprise, in others, have only been unfelt, because they have met with no occasion to call them into exercise. Such is the strife in which he is daily occupied. There was a time, perhaps, at his first entrance in good earnest upon the heavenward course, when he hoped that he should arrive, even on earth, at the complete, or nearly complete, extirpation of the evil that was within him ; but he has now learnt that such a hope was vain. All he looks for—and this indeed, if he be true to that Lord under whose banner he has enlisted, he increasingly experiences—all he hopes for, is, that the Spirit, like some mighty conqueror, shall place a garrison, so to speak, in every stronghold throughout the dominions of his restless foe, and be ready and able to march, at a moment's notice, to

quell the first risings of the rebellion which will incessantly be manifested.

But on that glorious day the struggle will be ended. The enemy that had harassed him, and kept him in continual disquiet from his birth to his death, he "shall see no more again for ever." Then, at length, the flesh shall be entirely subdued and annihilated. Then, at length, he shall receive a body which shall be free from all taint, not only of physical, but also of moral evil; yea, he shall be sanctified wholly, conformed in body, soul, and spirit, to the image of his Lord. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Himⁱ."

There is one other enemy—Death.

Death shall be subdued too. In some measure, even already the victory is begun. Christ hath overcome death in His own Person, and so hath delivered those "who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage^k." What is death now to the true servant of God but an empty phantom? Flesh and blood, indeed, will still shrink at the sight; but if there be a well-

ⁱ 1 John iii. 2.

^k Heb. ii. 15.

grounded hope that sin is pardoned, and that death has only come to set us free from the enemies who have so long harassed us, and to remove the barriers which keep us from our Lord, why should we start? The Israelites, doubtless, trembled at the thought of passing through the wondrous channel of waters which was opened before them; but the Egyptians were behind, and the land of promise was before, and the voice of their fathers' God sounded in their ears—"Speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward."

Thus far, then, death is already in a great measure stripped of his terrors; but in that great and glorious day, the victory shall be complete. These poor frail bodies, now subject to a thousand accidents, and which, at their very birth, bring with them into the world the seeds of disease and suffering, shall be exchanged for bodies over which death shall have no power. "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. . . And then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory¹."

These, then, are some of the enemies

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 53, 54.

over whom we may confidently hope to triumph. They may harass and annoy us now. At times they may alarm and terrify us. So, doubtless, did the hosts of Pharaoh the Israelites whom they pursued. But soon the conflict shall be ended. A few more years—perhaps a few more days—and the gulf which separates us from the eternal world shall be past, and we shall see our enemies dead upon the sea-shore.

But remember in whose strength we must prevail. The Israelites, by their own might, were unable to deliver themselves from the hands of their cruel enemy. The Lord looked, and there was none to help; and He wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore His own arm brought salvation unto him; and His fury, it upheld him. And He did tread down the people in His anger, and He made them drunk in His fury, and He brought their strength to the earth. And He led them by the right hand of Moses with His glorious arm, dividing the waters before him, to make Himself an everlasting name^m. It is the same Lord to whom our eyes must be turned. We are infinitely more weak and helpless to resist

^m Isai. lxiii. 5, 6, 12.

our enemy than the Israelites were to resist theirs. It is Christ who must work out our deliverance. It is Christ who must bruise Satan under our feet. It is Christ who must purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God. It is Christ whose Spirit, dwelling within us, must crucify here, and utterly annihilate hereafter, the corruption that is in our members. It is Christ who must deliver us from the fear of death in this world, and from the dominion of death in the next world, saying to death, "O death, I will be thy plagues;" and to the grave, "O grave, I will be thy destruction".

Blessed and praised for ever be His name! the victory which He wrought, as on this day, in His own person, is a pledge and assurance of the victory, which, at the day of the resurrection, He shall accomplish in the persons of all His people.

And now, what ought to be the effect produced by such anticipations as those in which we have been indulging? Shall we sit down, each man under his vine, and under his fig-tree, and take our rest, and wait quietly till the tide of time bears to-

* Hosea xiii. 14.

wards us that blessed day of which Easter is a type? No; we must not think of rest while we are yet in the midst of enemies; we must not think of rest till the fight is over, and the victory won. The use of such meditations is not to induce indolence, but rather to kindle our desires, to inflame our courage, to raise our hopes, and to string our energies; to lead us to be "stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord*."

Let us press on, therefore, in the road to life. Let us keep our eyes fixed upon the great Captain of our salvation; let us tread closely in His steps; let us look to Him for guidance, for encouragement, for strength;

* 1 Cor. xv. 58. Compare Phil. iii. 20, 21, iv. 1.—a passage remarkably parallel to the closing verses of 1 Cor. xv. It has suffered, in common with some others, by the division (otherwise so convenient) into chapters and verses. "Our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself. *Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.*"

and let us seek and expect these blessings at His hands, in the diligent use of those means of grace which He Himself has appointed; in prayer—private prayer and public prayer; in the study of His word; in attendance at His table. And let us add continual watchfulness, as those who bear in mind that they are encompassed by enemies on every side, and who remember in how many cases self-indulgence in matters of trifling importance, tampering with conscience in little things, treading unnecessarily or presumptuously upon the verge of danger, have been the preludes to some fearful fall—alas, too frequently to final apostasy and utter ruin.

It is but too possible there may be some present, who can have no real interest in the great subjects which have been brought before us. There may be those,—let us not judge others, but let each ask his own conscience as in the sight of God—there may be those, who are living in the allowed neglect of what they know they ought to do, or in the allowed practice of what they know they ought not to do. There may be those, who are engrossed with this present world, who, whatsoever serious thoughts,

and earnest wishes, and good resolutions, they may be conscious of at times, are yet not putting forth strenuous, and steady, and sustained efforts, to secure heaven. There may be those, who once pressed forward in the right way, once knew something of the enjoyment of religion, the happiness of coming with freedom and confidence, as dear children, into their Father's presence; the blessedness of affliction or self-denial when meekly endured for their Saviour's sake; but who have been entangled again in the toils of Satan, have forgotten the solemn vows which they made in baptism, and which they have again and again repeated at the Lord's table, and are dragging on a wretched existence, too much under the influence of conscience to enjoy the pleasures of sin, too little under the influence of conscience, or rather too disobedient to the suggestions of the Holy Spirit, to devote themselves to God.

My dear brethren, what is this day to you? To the true servant of God it is a day full of rejoicing; the most blessed, glorious day in the whole year. Alas! to you, while you remain thus, it should be a day full of sorrow, and heaviness, and gloom. The very

same resurrection, which will call the righteous to "receive the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world," will bid the ungodly "depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." The very same sun which saw the Israelites exulting in their deliverance, beheld the Egyptians "dead upon the sea-shore."

O make haste! make haste! "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon^p."

^p Isaiah lv. 6, 7.


SERMON VIII.

GOD'S HAND TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED IN HIS GOOD
GIFTS.

HOSEA ii. 8.

*She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine,
and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which
they prepared for Baal.*

THIS was God's charge against His ancient people ; a very heavy charge. He had poured down upon them unnumbered mercies ; He had separated them, in their first origin, from the rest of the nations ; He had planted them in a goodly land, " a land flowing with milk and honey ;" He had given them His holy law, and raised them up inspired instructors from time to time, while all the world beside were suffered to follow their own devices. And yet they were unmindful of their Benefactor ; they gave Him no thanks for His benefits ; nay, the thanks which they owed to Him they paid to devils. " She did not know"—God speaks of His people under the figure of a



woman—"she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal."

This was human nature : it was what we still see continually ; it may be, my brethren, what we exhibit in our own conduct. We are all prone to receive God's benefits as matters of course, without thankfulness, without thinking of the hand which gives them, in too many instances to use them against the Giver, and in the service of His enemy ; so, provoking God, as the Jews did, to withhold the blessings which we have enjoyed so unthankfully, that we may be taught, by the want of them, that they are not so much our own as we had thought.

It is a great part of true religion to see God's hand in every thing ; to trace every instance of protection to His providence, of deliverance to His care, every good gift to His love. One may observe in this, very markedly, the difference between Scripture and most other books. In other books, for the most part, as indeed in the ordinary way in which men speak, we hear only of second causes. We are said to have had a fine harvest because we had a dry season :

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they prepared for Baal.*

THIS was God's charge against His ancient people ; a very heavy charge. He had poured down upon them unnumbered mercies ; He had separated them, in their first origin, from the rest of the nations ; He had planted them in a goodly land, " a land flowing with milk and honey ;" He had given them His holy law, and raised them up inspired instructors from time to time, while all the world beside were suffered to follow their own devices. And yet they were unmindful of their Benefactor ; they gave Him no thanks for His benefits ; nay, the thanks which they owed to Him they paid to devils. " She did not know"—God speaks of His people under the figure of a

thus expostulating with His people for their forgetfulness of His hand : “ Hear now this, O foolish people, and without understanding; which have eyes, and see not; which have ears, and hear not : (that is, who do not and will not recognise God in His works :) Fear ye not Me ? saith the Lord : will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it : and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it ? But this people hath a revolting and a rebellious heart : they are revolted and gone. Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season : He reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of the harvest^a.” Take another passage from Psalm lxxv, and mark how, throughout, God is set forth as the gracious Author of all the fruitfulness and plenty which are so beautifully described : “ Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it : Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water : Thou preparest them corn, when

^a Jerem. v. 21—24.

Thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: Thou settlest the furrows thereof: Thou makest it soft with showers: Thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness; and the little hills rejoice on every side^b." Take, again, St. Paul's words to the people of Lystra: God "in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness^c." When Moses was giving his last charge to the Israelites, he dwelt very earnestly upon the importance of their bearing in mind, that they owed every thing they had to God: "Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God; . . . lest, when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein, and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied, then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord

^b Ps. lxx. 9—12.^c Acts xiv. 16, 17.

thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage ; who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water ; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint ; who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that He might humble thee, and that He might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end ; and thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God ; for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day^a.” I will add but one passage more : “ Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it : except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows ; for so He giveth His beloved sleep. Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward*.”

These passages, then, may serve as spe-

^a Deut. viii. 11—18.

* Ps. cxxvii. 1—3.

cimens of the manner in which God's hand is uniformly recognised, as distributing the good gifts which we receive. Here we have the rain and the harvest, the fruitfulness of the fields and the increase of the cattle, preservation in danger, support in want, power to get wealth, daily protection, the gift of children—all ascribed to God.

II. Now, take some examples of the manner in which we find the good men of old naturally and unconsciously, as though it were the settled habit of their minds, referring every blessing they enjoyed to God.

Here is the Psalmist's ascription of his protection through the night: "I laid me down and slept. I awaked; for the Lord sustained me¹." Do we distinctly realize the thought, when we arise in the morning, refreshed and strengthened after a good night's rest, that it is to God we are beholden for these mercies? Turn to the 24th chapter of Genesis, and observe how Abraham's servant, in almost every sentence he speaks, recognises God's hand, in the blessings bestowed on his master and on himself. For example, the success of his journey: "Blessed be the Lord God of my

¹ Ps. iii. 5.

master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren:" and, in like manner, his master's prosperity: "The Lord hath blessed my master greatly, and he is become great; and He hath given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses."

When Esau asks Jacob, Who the persons are that are with him, his answer is full of the same deep and present sense of God's being the Author of every blessing. They are "the children," he says, "which God hath graciously given thy servant^c." And when, many years afterwards, the same Jacob, in his old age, pronounced his dying blessing upon the children of his son Joseph, these were the words in which he expressed his prayer: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads^d."

These passages may serve as specimens of the language which God's saints spake of old. It is impossible to read them without

^c Gen. xxxiii. 5.

^d Gen. xlviii. 15, 16.

being struck with the abiding sense which these holy men seem to have had upon their minds of God's interference in all our concerns. They looked beyond second causes, and fixed their thoughts at once upon the great First Cause. And what they felt in their hearts, they were not ashamed to profess with their mouths: their language was a perpetual confession of their faith.

One feels how different from theirs is the way of speaking common among ourselves. It would sound strange and unusual, and some people would be apt to take offence, if God's name were as frequently introduced, when mention is made of our ordinary blessings. And, no doubt, it had better be omitted altogether, than used lightly and inconsiderately. But why should the Christian be driven to such an alternative? Why should he not speak habitually of God, as the Author of his mercies, and speak with reverence? Perhaps we are little aware how much influence our language has upon our thoughts. If we accustom ourselves to speak inaccurately, we shall learn to think inaccurately: if we accustom ourselves to speak like unbelievers, we shall learn to think like unbelievers: if God's name is

seldom in our mouths, it will be seldom in our hearts.

But this is only part of the lesson before us. It would be well if God's name were more frequently introduced, so it were done with reverence, when we speak of the good gifts which we enjoy. But the grand point is—and it is only in proportion as the other contributes to this that it is worth any thing—to acquire the habit of ascribing all our blessings to God in our hearts, and of thanking Him for them unfeignedly. We have seen in some measure, in the passages which have been brought forward, how plainly and earnestly Scripture teaches us this duty. I shall proceed to point out some of the advantages which would accrue from the practice of it.

1. It would be the surest way to secure the continuance of God's mercies, and to draw down more. Unthankfulness, and the neglect to acknowledge God's hand, provoke Him to take away His benefits. Thus, in the verse which follows the text, we find God threatening this very judgment: "She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore

will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof." And we most of us know that striking judgment threatened against unthankfulness in Deut. xxviii: "Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things." And so, no doubt, God deals with us still, both nationally and individually. If we receive His benefits as though they came of course, without acknowledging His hand, without giving Him thanks, without yielding the fruits of thankfulness in our lives, we shall be sure to bring down some heavy judgment or other, most likely the withdrawal of benefits of which we have shewn ourselves so unworthy; it may be a worse judgment still—the continuance of them, perhaps even the increase of them, and, at the same time, seared and hardened hearts, and careless and ungodly lives, only ripening us more and more for vengeance at the last. With regard to the withdrawal of God's mercies, we know not but that, in

many an instance, sickness has been sent, because in health we did not consider that health was God's gift ; war, because we did not value peace ; bad crops and unfruitful seasons, because, instead of being thankful for such harvests as we had, we were ingenious in finding out this or the other drawback for which to murmur ; just as I have heard people complain, after a harvest, which they could not but acknowledge to have been a very fine one, that the corn stood so upright, or was cut so early, or there were so many to glean, that the poor were not much the better for it after all. Far better, and far more becoming, instead of fixing our thoughts upon any evil that may chance to be—and, indeed, in this world, must be—mingled with our prosperity, to dwell only upon the good ; unless, indeed, so far as to moderate our affection for earthly things, and to train ourselves to long more and more earnestly for that blessed land, where every thing is perfect, and nothing enters that can lessen or impair God's gifts.

2. To recognise God, then, as the Author of our blessings, would contribute to secure the continuance of those blessings, and to

draw down more. But, further, it would keep our faith in exercise ; it would enable us to realize God's presence as our Friend and Benefactor ; it would bring us into sensible communion with God daily—many times a-day ; it would draw out our love to Christ, and enable us the better to appreciate His redeeming mercy, seeing that every temporal blessing we receive is the fruit of that ; and then what a happy life should we lead, thus filled with praise and thanksgiving ! It makes a wide difference, in our passage through the world, whether our minds have a tendency to turn to the bright or the dark side of things ; to thank God for what we have, or to murmur or complain for what we have not. It makes all the difference between a happy life and a wretched one. There are some men, whose path, let their outward circumstances be what they may—rich or poor, prosperous or unprosperous—seems to be all sunshine. The truth is, they carry the sunshine with them in their hearts. There are others, whose path seems to be all gloom ; and these also carry the gloom with them in their hearts. But he who sees God's hand in every thing ; who recognises God as the

Author of all his blessings ; who finds, in every occurrence throughout the day, some reason or other for thankfulness, blessing and praising God, in and through Christ, for His good gifts ; this man is sure to be happy, and, being happy, when his happiness proceeds from such a source, he must needs also be fruitful in good works. Good works are like the produce of our fields : they need sunshine as well as showers. The corn would never ripen, if we had nothing but dull, dark days ; and the Christian will never bring forth his full measure of holiness, if his life is passed in gloom and sadness. To be forward in recognising God's hand, acknowledging His mercies, and blessing Him for His good gifts, is an excellent help to zeal and diligence in God's service ; as, indeed, zeal and diligence are the natural expressions and necessary consequences of such exercises.

Thus I have tried to shew, that Scripture every where recognises God as the Author and Giver of all good gifts, and that the saints of old, in their constant practice, did so recognise Him ; and, further, I have tried to set forth the advantages which would accrue to us, if we were studiously to refer

whatsoever benefits we receive to God, praising Him with our mouths, and cherishing all manner of thankful thoughts in our hearts. It only remains that we each press home upon ourselves this blessed duty. Let us each make it our daily endeavour to acknowledge God's hand, in the mercies with which our paths are strewn ; and, if we are careful to observe, we shall find some instance or other every hour. When we awake in the morning, let our first thoughts be, "It is God who hath given me this refreshing rest. His fatherly hand has been over me while I slept. To Him I owe it that I arise in health and strength, fitted for the duties of the day." When we partake of our food, let us be sure that the grace we say (and what Christian will partake of his food without saying grace ?) is not an empty form, carelessly hurried over, as if we were half ashamed to say it, but the sincere expression of thankful hearts. When we go forth to our work, or whatsoever occupation is before us, let the consciousness of health and strength again lead our thoughts to Him from whom they come. If we set out upon a journey, and return home in safety, do not let us regard this as though

it were a matter of course, but let us acknowledge God's hand in protecting us, and praise Him for His care. If we are blessed with favourable weather and a fruitful harvest, let us not forget from Whom these blessings come, nor provoke God's judgments against us, another year, by our insensibility and unthankfulness this, but let us with heart and voice render unto Him earnest and sincere thanks for His good gifts.

But there is one main point, my brethren, which must be attended to, otherwise all these considerations, and a thousand more of the same description, will be—at least, may well be—of little effect; and that is, that we make sure of our interest in the greatest of all God's gifts, the gift of His dear Son. He who has a part in this, has his heart ready tuned to praise God for the slightest boon; but he who is without it, what can countervail the want? There are even earthly blessings, the lack of which is enough to mar, if not to destroy, the comfort of all other earthly blessings; health, for instance, or the use of our reason. If a man has lost his health or his senses, what profit has he of riches, or friends, or any other good things? But how much

more, where the soul is disordered—yea, dying, and even dead! What are even health and a strong mind, and honour and reputation, and a thousand other things which are desirable for this world—what are they all to him, who carries about an accusing conscience, whose soul is estranged from Christ, and in peril of eternal misery? Make sure, then, of this, my brethren—this chief blessing, this sun of blessings, whose light lights up all other blessings, and without which all others are darkness. How shall we make sure of it? How shall we have Christ for our portion, eternal life for our inheritance, heaven for our home? Need I say how? Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; accept Him as God's appointed Saviour—"the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world;" seek pardon in His name; seek grace and strength from His Spirit; yield up yourselves to serve Him; and beseech Him to give you grace to serve Him. Thus do, and you are safe; thus continue to do, and you shall continue safe; and, when this life of trial and imperfection is ended, you shall ascribe all glory and praise and thanksgiving unto God, throughout all ages, in His name.

SERMON IX.

ABRAHAM'S SERVANT.

GEN. xxiv. 48.

I bowed down my head, and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the Lord God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son.

It is a common excuse which men make for not attending to religion, that they are, of necessity, so busied with the concerns of this world, as to have no time to think about those of the next. They rise up in the morning, they go forth to their employments, and, during the intervening hours, they are wholly occupied in providing for the wants of themselves and their families; how is it possible they should take thought for their souls? It is very possible: for religion is nothing else than discharging our daily duties, the duties of that place to which God has appointed us, as to God; living in His fear all the day long, acknowledging Him in all our ways,

doing every thing, even our most common actions, to His glory. And if a regard for God do not thus hallow our ordinary employments, leaven, as it were, the occupations of every hour, no matter how much time we spend in prayer and devotion, we have reason to fear that our religious state is very far from being healthy and vigorous.

And this account of religion agrees with what we read of the holy men mentioned in Scripture. They were remarkable not so much for any extraordinary fastings, or painful mortifications, or lofty flights of devotion, as for an habitual regard to God in all their actions. They were indeed eminently men of prayer; men who delighted to hold communion with their heavenly Father; and, by prayer, they drew water from the wells of salvation, and obtained that plentiful outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which nurtured and increased the various graces which the hand of God had planted in their souls: still, it is in the discharge of those duties to which their several stations and relationships called them, that their religion is most frequently brought before our notice.

The chapter from which the text is

taken contains a striking illustration of the truth of these remarks. We find Abraham proposing to seek a wife for his son Isaac. He will allow of no connexion with the women of Canaan, because the Canaanites were a people who feared not God. He expressly forbids that his son should go and dwell in the land from whence he himself had come, because God had called him to leave that land, and had commanded him and his posterity to renounce it for ever. And when a question of his servant's implied a doubt, that, possibly, the woman, who should in other respects appear suitable as a wife for Isaac, might be unwilling to forsake her kindred and her country, the affectionate and childlike confidence, with which he was wont to rest himself upon his heavenly Father, immediately shewed itself in these remarkable words: "The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land, He shall send His angel before thee." In all this, we see Abraham's religion influencing his conduct in the common concerns of life. In his plans, his motives, his

hopes, his encouragements, regard to God constantly occupies the foremost place.

But it is to the conduct of Abraham's servant, rather than of Abraham himself, that I would on the present occasion draw your thoughts. And yet, if there be any thing in that conduct deserving of imitation, it is instructive to consider, that even here also, we have a silent testimony to the practical nature of Abraham's religion in domestic life, and that the holy instructions, the godly and consistent example of the master, are reflected to our eyes in the behaviour of the servant*.

If then there be any present, who are employed as servants or labourers, or who are intrusted with the affairs of others, (and this will necessarily include a very large number, and take in persons of every rank,) let me beg them to observe, how the religion of this religious servant shewed itself in the discharge of the duties of his place. And though there be those, who call no man master on earth ; yet, forasmuch as we all profess ourselves to be servants of God, we may all gain some useful hints for our conduct towards our heavenly Master, from

* See Gen. xviii. 19.

the manner in which Abraham's servant behaved himself towards his earthly master.

1. We may notice then, in the first place, the forethought of Abraham's servant, and the pains he takes to make himself acquainted with his master's wishes. It occurs to him, that possibly the woman whom he may choose may not be willing to leave her family and her country. Before, therefore, he will set out upon his journey, he is careful to inform himself, clearly and fully, how, in that event, his master would have him act. "Peradventure the women will not be willing to follow me into this land : must I needs bring thy son into the land again from whence thou camest ?"

Now, suppose that the servant had not thought of this difficulty, till after he had set out upon his journey ; or that he had thought of it, but that he had been indifferent to his master's interest, or afraid, lest by asking questions, he should draw forth more precise orders, and so increase the labour and trouble of his errand ; in any of these cases, he might have arranged, that Isaac should go and dwell with Rebekah, in that country which Abraham and Abraham's

children were to renounce for ever ; and thus, his journey would have been fruitless, and his labour lost.

A truly religious servant will not rest satisfied with a cold and heartless discharge of those particular duties, which are expressly required of him. He will take pains to find out the wishes of his employer, even though, by so doing, he may be likely to increase his labour. That servant, who is careless and indifferent as to the interests of his earthly master, has great reason to suspect that he is careless and indifferent as to the interests of his heavenly Master.

Of that heavenly Master, indeed, we all profess ourselves to be servants. Are we as careful to inform ourselves of His will, as Abraham's servant was to make himself acquainted with the wishes of his earthly master ?

Some, alas, seem to live as if they had no such Master. They give themselves no concern to discover the will of God. They take no pains to enquire, whether the thoughts they think, the words they speak, the deeds they do, are such as God approves, or such as God hates. To abstain from any particular action, because they know, or

suspect, that it would be displeasing to God; or to persevere in a course of painful and self-denying duty, because they believe it to be the path in which God would have them walk;—to such motives as these they are altogether strangers. In one word, they live without God in the world. They might as properly call themselves subjects of the Emperor of China, as servants of the God of Heaven. Can such men expect, that, if they continue thus, God will own them as His at the last day?

But, perhaps, many of us do not come under this description. Our hearts bear us witness that we do pay some regard to the will of God. It is well. But let us ask ourselves, are we honestly seeking to know the whole of that will? Are there no duties of which we dislike to be told? No sins for which we are wont to plead? Are there no passages of Scripture to which we have a secret distaste, and which, when they are brought before us, we endeavour to explain away? Is there no one who would gladly have his eyes blinded a while longer, that he might be able to urge, in excuse for his transgression, that it was done in ignorance? No one, whose sorrow for sin is rather pain,

arising from the struggle between conscience and some evil purpose secretly harboured, than brokenness of heart arising from shame and self-abhorrence, on account of offences already committed against a God of holiness and of love? Do we never consult our friends, or examine the Scriptures, with the view of discovering how far we may safely proceed in any particular course without endangering our souls; or of confirming ourselves in plans on which we have already set our minds^b, rather than of learning, in simplicity and godly sincerity, what is the best and most effectual way in which we may glorify God?

Alas, if our hearts condemn us in any of these particulars, what abundant reason have we to confess, that we have been wicked and slothful servants, and that, so far from possessing any claim upon heaven as a reward, we deserve nothing but condemnation! And how dear to us, if we are really in earnest in seeking to be delivered from this wretched bondage, how dear to us should be those passages of the word of God, which tell us of a Saviour, whose blood cleanseth from all sin, and of a Spirit,

^b See an instance of this, Jer. xlii. and xliii. 1—8.

whose gracious office it is both to teach the will of God, and at the same time also to give strength to perform that will!

But if any be wilfully continuing in such a state, too indolent to break away from the bondage in which they are held, and content to serve God in the spirit of a slave, instead of yielding Him the affectionate and cheerful obedience of a child, let them not deceive themselves. They are not happy now: they know they are not. They cannot enjoy the delights of sin. And as to the joys of religion, the peace of God, the hope of heaven, the affectionate actings of a grateful heart; to these they are altogether strangers. Continuing thus, can they ever be happy here on earth? Alas, it is from persons of this description, that melancholy and madness so often choose out their victims. Continuing thus, can they be happy in the hour of death? They, who have been much in the chambers of dying men, know that they who pass out of life in horror and despair are not usually persons who are grossly ignorant, nor persons whose hearts have grown hard by a long course of sin; such, for the most part, have no bands in their death; but persons

who live partially under the influence of conscience, sufficiently so to be rendered unhappy in the course they are pursuing, but not sufficiently so to be roused from their indolence, and driven in good earnest to the Saviour. Continuing thus, how shall they meet their Lord, when He comes to reckon with His servants? Alas, their lives have been one tissue of unfaithfulness; they have looked upon God as a hard master; they have hid their talent in the earth; and now, the sentence is hanging upon His lips: "Cast ye the unprofitable servant unto outer darkness."

2. But we must leave this gloomy picture. Abraham's servant sets out upon his journey, and, after travelling for some days, arrives, towards evening, at the outskirts of the city in which Abraham's kindred dwelt. And here we have a still plainer and more unequivocal proof both of the lively interest which he felt in his master's concerns, and of the religious motives by which he was influenced. He prays for his master. "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham." And

• Matt. xxv. 30.

when his prayer appears to be receiving an answer, and every thing seems to promise a favourable issue to his journey, his grateful heart runs over with thanksgiving on his master's behalf: "Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth."

Christian servants, do you pray for your masters? Do you, day by day, beseech God to send His blessing upon them, upon their families, upon their affairs, and more especially upon those of their affairs which are intrusted to your care? And if your masters have been favoured with any particular mercies, do you so far share in their joy, as to give thanks in their behalf? If not, then learn a lesson from the example of Abraham's servant, and let no day pass in future, in which you do not bend your knees in behalf of your employers.

Nor will these your prayers and praises, if only they be offered up in sincerity, fail to flow back in blessings upon yourselves. They will increase your love to those for whom you pray. They will hallow your common daily work. They will lighten the various duties which are required of you, and enable you to discharge them with a

zeal and a fidelity, to which otherwise you would probably have been strangers.

Come with me to the chamber of yonder religious servant. He is obliged to rise early for his work. He has risen yet earlier, that he may have a few moments for his daily employment of prayer and praise. He is alone with his God. He is on his knees. His Bible is beside him. He had stood by the window, that the grey morning light might fall upon the holy book, which is itself a light unto his feet, and a lantern unto his paths. Hark, he prays. He is imploring blessings upon his master and his mistress, upon their children, upon their concerns. O Lord God of my master, "I pray Thee send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master." Nor are his fellow-servants forgotten. Silver and gold he has none, but what he has, that he gives; and it is a gift, such as a king might rejoice either to bestow or receive.

Now follow this man throughout the day. Do you think he will go about his work with indifference? Will he put on the appearance of diligence while his master is by, and then relax into sloth and negligence when he is left alone? Will you find him

refusing to do some things, because they are not his business? or increasing the toil and burden of his proper labour, by discontent and complaining? Will you hear him speaking unkindly of his employer when he is absent, or returning him disrespectful answers when he is by? No! if he felt as he prayed, he will carry something of that temper with which he rose from his knees into his common work. To himself, indeed, he will doubtless be conscious of much that is wrong; and probably many a confession of sloth, and negligence, and want of love, will he pour out in secret, when he kneels, at night, before his God. But his own eyes, it is likely, will have been the only human eyes that have marked his failings in these respects. Whatever others may have to object against him, they will have little reason to charge him with negligence or indifference in his master's service.

And before we leave this subject, let us all, as servants of God, ask ourselves, whether the interest which we take in the concerns of our heavenly Master, shews itself in the same way, in which the zeal of Abraham's servant, towards his earthly master, was manifested. Does it lead us to prayer and

thanksgiving? Whatever is our appointed duty, the duty of our particular place and circumstances; whether our labour be that of the mind or that of the body; whether we be called to act or to suffer; whatever it be that is required of us, that is the work which our heavenly Master has appointed us to do. And upon that work, that it may prosper in our hands, we shall surely, if we love God, ask His blessing; and if it do appear to prosper, then we shall, with equal readiness, offer up our praises and thanksgivings. Oh, how would this practice, if performed in sincerity of heart, hallow the most common duties, soothe the most painful sufferings, and lighten the most burdensome employments!

3. But we must hasten to notice a third point, in the conduct of this faithful servant; The indifference to his own personal comfort with which he prosecutes his master's business. He had come from a long journey, and doubtless stood in need of refreshment and rest; yet, such was his zeal for the success of the matter intrusted to him, that he would not sit down till he had first told his errand, obtained a favourable answer from the parties concerned, and returned

thanks to God for the success which had thus far attended his steps^b.

Christian servants, do you take as lively an interest in the service of your employers? Are you as ready to forego your own comfort and convenience, in your zeal for the furtherance of the business with which you may have been intrusted? What would Abraham's servant have thought, if he had been told of those, who, so far from sacrificing their own convenience to their master's interest, make no scruple, provided they can do it without being noticed, of sacrificing their master's interest to their own convenience?

But let us, once more, compare our conduct, as servants of God, with the zeal and disregard of self, which are manifested in the behaviour of this servant of Abraham. Where, indeed, shall we look for similar devotedness? Alas, it would be easy to bring forward instances from common daily life, which shew a temper the very opposite of that which has been brought before us. Consider, for example, how eagerly excuses are often caught at for the neglect of those duties, which, as Chris-

^b Gen. xxiv. 32—54.

tians, we should look upon as our chief privileges. How frequently is that held to be a sufficient reason for absence from the House of God on Sunday, which would have no influence whatever in keeping those who allege it from their business or their pleasure—the shop, the field, the market, or the dinner-party—on a week-day? How often does it happen, that the very same persons, who can spare but little money or time, when some work of charity is to be done, can yet, when they themselves are to be gratified, find both time for unnecessary occupations, and money for unnecessary expenses! How often are those, who are full of life and activity, in the pursuit of their own plans, their own interest, their own advancement, cold, and languid, and heartless, in the cause of God! When some earthly object is to be gained, when the eyes of those whom they wish to please are upon them, then no labour is thought too great, no self-denial too painful: but when it is merely the cause of Christ which is to be promoted, some quiet and unobserved course of benevolence towards man to be pursued, with scarcely a single witness but God of their well-doing,

how quickly does their ardour cool, and their patience fail!

Alas, who is there among us, that does not feel himself unworthy to be called by the name of that Saviour, who, when, for our sakes, He laid aside His glory, and took upon Him the form of a servant, counted it His meat and drink to do the will of Him who had sent Him!

4. The last proof I shall mention of the fidelity of Abraham's servant, is his carefulness in husbanding his master's time. No sooner had he concluded his arrangements with Laban and Bethuel, and taken such refreshment as was absolutely necessary, than he prepared for his return. "They rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away unto my master. And the brother and the mother of Rebekah said, Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go. And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away, that I may go to my master*."

Perhaps there is nothing that is abused or wasted, with so little scruple, by those who are intrusted with the affairs of others,

* Gen. xxiv. 54—56.

as time. Many, who are strictly honest with regard to their employers' property, who not only would not take for their own use the goods committed to their care, but would be at considerable pains to prevent what has been intrusted to them from being injured or wasted, do, notwithstanding, make little or no account of wasting their employers' time.

And yet, let it be remembered, that he who wastes his employer's time, does, in effect, waste his employer's money. If a man spends three days in doing that which he might have done in two, and yet receives the wages of three days, he plainly defrauds his employer of one day's wages. That such conduct is less criminal than downright theft, it would be hard to shew.

And here too we shall do well to enquire, whether, as servants of God, we have been faithful to our heavenly Master, in the article of time.

To every thing there is a season. Every hour has its proper occupation. There is a time for prayer, a time for doing the work of our calling, a time for relaxation, a time for rest. And the Christian will remember, that he is accountable to God for the manner in which every hour is passed.

Do we, then, endeavour to spend our whole day for God? Does each hour, as its number is sounded in our ears, find us engaged in our proper work, and occupied about our Father's business? Do we never hasten over irksome and unpleasant duties, at the expense of doing them slightly and imperfectly, that we may have more leisure for those employments in which we delight? Do we set apart, each day, a sufficient portion of time for devotion; and the time which we do set apart, are we careful to redeem it, and make the most of it? Or does not it often happen, that there is no hour, throughout the day, which hangs so heavily on our hands, as that which conscience has prevailed upon us to devote to God; no day, throughout the week, of which the proper work is done so indolently, as that which God has commanded to be separated for Himself?

Oh, let us learn to bear about with us a more lively and more abiding recollection, that we are not our own; that we have been bought with a price, even with the precious blood of Christ; and that our time, as well as every other talent, is to be spent in God's service, and for God's glory. And

when the world, or the flesh, or our own evil hearts, would fain persuade us to do our work slothfully and carelessly, or turn us aside altogether from our proper employments, let us be ready, with Abraham's servant, to reply, "Hinder me not; send me away, that I may go to my Master."

But it is time to draw these remarks to a close. The portion of sacred history, which has been brought before us, exhibits an admirable instance of fidelity and attachment, on the part of Abraham's servant.

We have seen his care to make himself fully acquainted with his master's wishes. We have noticed his prayers and thanksgivings in his master's behalf; his disregard of his own personal comfort, in his zeal for the furtherance of his master's cause; and his anxiety to finish, with as little delay as possible, the work on which he had been sent. In a word, we have seen him executing his master's business with as much diligence, and with as lively an interest, as if it had been his own.

Now, what was the secret spring of his conduct? What was that hidden principle, which kindled his zeal, and made it burn

with a bright and steady flame throughout his journey?

The question is soon answered. That principle was Love. He loved his master. Love lightens every toil, and sweetens every labour. "Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her^d."

Christian brethren, servants of the living God, have we felt ourselves condemned, while we have been comparing our own zeal, in the cause of our heavenly Master, with the zeal of Abraham's servant, in the cause of his earthly master? Are we forced to confess, that there have been times when we have shrunk from enquiring into the will of God; that our wishes and our prayers for the furtherance of the work intrusted to our care have been cold and languid; that often we have been kept back from our proper occupation by self-indulgence, and hindered by light and frivolous excuses; and that we have been slothful and indolent in the employment of our time, hastening superficially over disagreeable duties, and cutting short, or wasting, the hours which should have been set apart for communion with

^d Gen. xxix. 20.

our heavenly Father ? And do we ask how we may attain unto higher things, and overcome our sloth, and cast aside our indifference, and serve God with a purer, holier, and steadier service ?

This question too is soon answered. We must have a principle of love. We must serve God less in the spirit of a slave, more in the spirit of a child. All other obedience is forced and unnatural. It is only love which can dispose us in all things to seek, in all things to do, the will of God. It is only love which can support us through a long course of painful and self-denying duty. It is only love which can teach us to look upon God's cause as our cause, and to do His work as heartily and as cheerfully as if it were our own. Other motives, indeed, (for God has given none in vain,) will have, and ought to have, their influence ; but the grand and governing principle of Christianity is love. " Love is the fulfilling of the law." " In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision ; but faith, which worketh by love¹." " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and

* Rom. xiii. 10.

¹ Galatians v. 6.

with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment*.”

And this is that to which we have been called. Why has God redeemed us with the precious blood of His own most dear Son? Is it not that we also might become His sons? And why has He sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts? Is it not that we might learn to cry, Abba, Father? And why does He teach us to call Him by that most endearing name? Is it not that we might love Him with a child-like love?

Do we ask how we may attain unto this love? It is one of the fruits of faith; for faith worketh by love. And if we would have our love increased, we must accustom ourselves to more frequent and more steadfast views of things unseen. We must learn to look upon Christ, as our Saviour, and upon God, as, through Christ, our reconciled Father.

But let it be most distinctly remembered, that neither love, nor faith, nor any other grace, can we, by our own efforts, produce in ourselves. Whatsoever of good is wrought in the Christian, is wrought by the Holy Spirit. It is the peculiar office

* Matt. xxii. 37, 38.

of the Holy Spirit to sanctify us, and make us meet for our Father's presence. If then we would have the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, let us be much and earnest in our prayers for a more abundant measure of His blessed gift.

And if any have hitherto been like the poor prodigal; if they have been long strangers to their Father's house, wasting their substance in riotous living, and reduced to want and misery by reason of their folly; O, let them now, at length, awake to a sense of their wretchedness; let them arise and go to their Father, and confess that they have sinned against Him, and are no longer worthy to be called His children; and let them beseech Him to forgive them their sins, and to take them back into His favour, and to suffer them to serve Him in any, even the lowest, capacity. Behold, while they are yet afar off, He sees them, He recognises them, He runs to meet them, He falls upon their necks, He kisses them. Hark! the words are even now upon His lips; "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found^h."

^h Luke xv. 24.

SERMON X.

SUBMISSION TO HUMAN ORDINANCES.

Preached on the 29th of May, 1836, the Anniversary of the
Restoration.

1 PETER ii. 13.

*Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the
Lord's sake.*

THIS day, I need scarcely mention, is the anniversary of a very signal blessing vouchsafed to this nation,—“the deliverance of these kingdoms from the great rebellion, and all the miseries and oppressions consequent thereupon,” and the restoration of the Monarchy, and of the public and free profession of our religion, according to the form delivered down from former ages. Every one has heard of the wars and commotions, which, about 200 years ago, distracted our country. Our forefathers witnessed them with their own eyes. They could tell us, if they were alive, how men stood in doubt whether they should sow their fields, because they knew not but that,

before the harvest came, their crops might be trodden under foot by contending armies. They could tell us, how, within the sound of our church-bells, even in the fields of our own parish*, men, born in the same country,

* Wardington, where this sermon was preached, is a chapelry in the parish of Cropredy, in Oxfordshire, which was the scene of one of Charles's conflicts. See Clarendon, vol. iv. pp. 500, &c. A field, within half a mile of Wardington church, still bears the name of the "Ash Ground," from an ash tree, under which the King rested before the fight, and the space around which became of some importance in the course of the struggle. The parish register contains the following entry: "Anno Domini 1644, Junii 30, buried John Burrell, cornet to Colonell Richard Neville. Mr. Burrell was slaine y^e day before in y^e battaile against y^e rebelles. Ita testor Henr. Dean, Capt. Regim." Another hand, apparently of the same age, has drawn a pen through the words, "against y^e rebelles," and written at the side, "against y^e Parliament."

In the burial-register of Warmington, a neighbouring parish, in the adjoining county of Warwick, the following entries occur in connexion with the battle of Edge-hill, the scene of which is about four miles distant: "The battell was fought by our Sovraigne Lord King Charles and the Earle of Essex the three and twentieth day of October, being Sabbath day, ano Dom. 1642.... betweene Radewaie. and Kington.

"Richard Sannes Captaine of a ffoote companie, a gentleman of Worcestershier, was buried in Warmington Churchyard the ffour and twentieth daie of October ano Dom. 1642.

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and calling themselves by the name of the same Saviour, met together in deadly strife, and spilt one another's blood as water; and they could point, in our own churchyard, and in the churchyards of the neighbourhood, to spots, now smooth and green, as though the turf had never been disturbed, where sleep the bodies of those who were slain in war. They could tell us also, how, when they were gathered together to worship God, they were liable to be broken in upon by armed soldiers, and to have their Service^b turned into ridicule, their prayer-

“ Alexander Gourdon, a Scotsman, was buried the five and twentieth daie of October anno Dom. 1642 ut supra.” (A grave-stone with this name and date is still to be seen in the Churchyard.)

“ Also seven other were buried in Warmington Churchyard shortly after; whose names I know not, and it is reported that one or two more wer buried within the fieldes and parish of Warmington aforesaide.”

Banbury, the nearest market town, still retains many records of the troubles of those times. See Beesley's History of Banbury, a work replete with valuable local information, as well as with much matter of general historical interest.

^b “ Dec. 25, 1647, I went to London with my wife to celebrate Christmas-day; Mr. Gunning preached in Exeter chapell on Michah vii. 3. Sermon ended, as he was giving us the holy Sacrament, the chapell was

books torn in pieces before their eyes, and themselves rudely handled; how, in some places, the churches were defaced and pillaged, and in others, were turned into barracks for soldiers, or stables for horses^c. They could tell us, how, for a time, there was no one to put the laws in force, and every man did what was right in his own eyes, and crime had licence to grow, till robbery and murder became common offences.

Those were evil times. For the sins of the nation, (doubtless the sins of both rulers

surrounded with souldiers, and all the communicants and assembly surpriz'd and kept prisoners by them As we went up to receive the Sacrament, the miscreants held their muskets against us, as if they would have shot us at the altar, but yet suffering us to finish the Office of Communion, as perhaps not having instructions what to do in case they found us in that action." Evelyn's Diary, vol. ii. p. 126. "The soldiers would appear, and visibly oppose and disturb him in the church when he read prayers, some of them pretending to advise him how God was to be served more acceptably; which he not approving, but continuing to observe order and decent behaviour in reading the Church Service, they forced his book from him, and tore it, expecting extemporary prayers." Walton's Life of Bishop Sanderson.

^c This is said to have been the case at Hanwell, another village in the neighbourhood.

and people,) it pleased God to suffer anarchy and confusion to prevail. There had been oppression, on the part of those in power, and this was followed by insubordination and rebellion, on the part of those in subjection. And ungodly men, disregarding the plain precepts of God's word, took the law into their own hands, rose up against their King, tore the crown from his head, and dipped their swords in his blood: and then they ruled after their own fashion, till people grew weary of strife, and sick of contention, and sighed for past times, and wished for the peace and tranquillity which, till they lost, they knew not how to value. And so, when, for nearly twenty years, they had been schooled and disciplined with the rod themselves had made, it pleased God, of His mercy, to put it into their hearts, of their own accord, to restore matters, as far as might be, to their former state. It was as on this day, May 29, 1660, that the rightful King was brought back to his throne. "I stood in the Strand," says one who lived in those times, and was by, when Charles the Second made his entry into London, "I stood and beheld it, and blessed God; and all this was done without

one drop of blood shed, and by that very army which rebelled against him. But it was the Lord's doing; for such a restoration was never mentioned in any history, ancient or modern, since the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, nor so joyful a day and so bright ever seen in this nation; this happening, when to expect or effect it was past all human policy^d."

It is in commemoration then of this great and signal blessing, that the 29th of May has been appointed to be observed, as a day of solemn thanksgiving. Some persons perhaps might be inclined to think, that it is scarcely necessary to keep up the remembrance of events which took place so many years ago. But there are good reasons for the observance. God's mercies are not the less to be had in memory, because it is long since they were granted. A century or two in the existence of a nation are but as five or ten years in the life of an individual; and it would ill become any of us to cease to thank God for any signal blessing vouchsafed to Him, simply because it was five or ten years since he received it. The Jews were

^d Evelyn's Diary, vol. ii. p. 149.

taught to keep up, till the latest times, the remembrance of their great national mercies; and they do so, even at this day, though driven forth from their land, and though many hundreds of years have run their round, since those mercies were vouchsafed. Besides, the observance of such a day as this may serve to set before us, when rightly improved, the horrors of civil war, and the great and unspeakable blessing of peace; and to teach us to value our advantages and privileges, while we have them, instead of loving change, and thinking any state of things better than the present.

It may be enough just to have hinted at these subjects. We may, if we will, follow them out in our thoughts when we are alone. For the present, I would rather dwell upon another point, not less closely connected with the events which the day calls to mind; one too, to which, from the portion of Scripture fixed upon for the Epistle, it was evidently intended that our attention should be directed—the duty of submission to rulers. It is a subject which it is the more important to bring forward on

such occasions, inasmuch as it is, perhaps, passed over and neglected, in the multitude of matters which ordinarily force themselves upon our notice. There are certain great principles and rules of conduct in reference to it, which it behoves every Christian thoroughly to understand, and act upon; and, through ignorance of which, many, when they are called upon to act, act in strange and lamentable inconsistency with the religion which they profess. Our rule then is this: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the King, as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him."

Now observe how full and express the word of God is upon this point; we are to submit ourselves to every ordinance of man; to all who are set in authority over us, whether the King, or those, who, under God, derive their authority from the King. And this, of course, implies obedience to the laws, in every particular, as well as to all such lawful commands of those placed over us, as are enjoined by them, in the exercise of their authority.

It is important to set this rule forth

clearly and distinctly, because there are those, who would not, on any account, wilfully break the laws of God, who yet think there is no great evil committed, if they break the laws of man, provided that those laws concern only indifferent matters—matters, that is, which, but for them, would have been free. For example, they would be shocked at the idea of swearing or stealing; and they would be conscious that they were doing wrong in indulging evil tempers, or unholy thoughts, or angry words; but they account it a light matter to evade paying a tax, which they happen to think burthensome, or to buy or sell goods, on which custom ought to have been, but has not been, charged. But we must bear in mind, that man's laws, when once enacted by those lawfully appointed over us, become, in effect, God's laws too; insomuch that he, who, in respect of them, resists man, resists God also. In every case where men are associated together, there must be rules either expressed or implied. Even in a family, if there be any thing like order and regularity, there will be something of this sort; there will be rules framed for the good management of the household—not written

rules, nor, perhaps, rules that were ever expressed in words, but still rules which all understand. So, in a parish, there will be regulations framed by those to whom the law of the land has given authority in such matters, for the good order of the parish, the repair of roads, the preservation of public buildings, &c. So, in like manner, in the case of a district, or a county. These things concern us in our domestic and civil capacity. And in every instance, in whatsoever is appointed by those invested with lawful authority, the Christian's duty is plain—he is to “submit himself to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake.”

The case is the same, with regard to those regulations which concern us as members of a religious community—as members of the Church. There are some laws, which are directly and at once binding upon us, as being the express commandments of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the great Head of the Church; such, for example, as those which enjoin the observance of the two Sacraments, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. But there are others, which have been ordained by men, acting by authority derived from Him, and which, seeing that Christ

has not left us in His word minute and particular directions, were necessary to be so ordained, for the doing of all things according to the Apostle's rule, "decently and in order*." These are, in themselves indifferent, varying, in many instances, in various countries, and at various times. Still, when once enjoined by those whom God has invested with authority, they are binding upon us, and it is our duty to comply with them, "for the Lord's sake." For example, the Church requires, that when a child is to be baptized, there should be three sponsors—two godfathers and one godmother for a boy, two godmothers and one godfather for a girl; and also that fathers should not stand for their own children. Now these matters are in themselves indifferent. They are neither commanded nor forbidden in the word of God; they are not in any wise essential to the administration of Baptism, and, in different countries, and at different times, different laws have prevailed respecting them. Still it is enough for us that those set in authority have so appointed. We are to "submit

* 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

ourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake."

But it will be asked, Is there no case in which Christians may refuse obedience? When it is said, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man," does this admit of no exception? Yes, there is one exception: when man's laws are in opposition to God's. If man should enjoin what God forbids, or if man should forbid what God enjoins, in this case we are released from obedience.

Suppose, for example, a law were to be framed, enacting, like that once enacted by Darius, that for a certain space no one should offer up prayer to God; or requiring idolatrous worship, or abolishing all public services of religion—in any such case, a higher power claims our obedience. We must obey God rather than man^f. This then is the exception—that if, at any time, we are required by those placed in authority over us to act in opposition to the law of God, we are not bound to obey; nay, on the contrary, we are bound to disobey.

But then we must be very careful how we pronounce any injunction to be opposed

^f See Acts v. 29.

to the law of God. It is easy to pretend conscience; or, without pretending, it is easy for conscience to be misled. Our Lord speaks of those who should persecute His people, and think that, in doing so, they were rendering God service. No Christian will take any decisive step under such circumstances without much self-examination, and careful study of God's word, and earnest prayer for the teaching of the Holy Ghost. And it should be added, that, in all doubtful cases, wheresoever we are not clearly decided as to what is the will of God, we are bound, while we continue in doubt, to abide in obedience to the laws of man.

But though we are bound to refuse obedience to human laws, when they are in opposition to the laws of God, yet we are not hereby justified in *resisting* them. If we cannot in conscience comply with them, it behoves us meekly and patiently to submit to the penalty. Of course we may use all lawful means of escape from it, or, if we will, all lawful means of procuring an alteration in the law itself. But if neither of these can be effected, endurance is our only course. And herein we have no lack of ex-

amples in God's word. When the king of Babylon had put forth a decree, requiring his subjects to fall down and worship the golden image which he had set up, the three Hebrew children refused to obey. God's law forbade obedience. They firmly, yet respectfully, told the king, that they neither could nor would prostrate themselves before his idol. "We are not careful," they said, "to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Thus far they went. But there was no reviling, no reproachful or abusive words. They calmly left their cause in God's hands. Of like kind was the conduct of the Apostles when forbidden to preach in the name of Jesus. Their Lord Himself had given them charge so to preach: this was their warrant. They answered therefore, "We ought to obey God rather than man." And their conduct was in accordance with this instance to the end of their lives. They preached, and they suffered. But their

sufferings they took meekly and patiently, without resistance, without stirring up others to resist.

But what is the Christian's course, when human laws, though not opposed to any express command of God, are yet harsh and oppressive; or at any rate are thought to be such, and cannot be obeyed without much and painful self-denial? There can be no doubt in this case. It is the Christian's duty to obey. He may take all lawful methods to obtain relief, but he must not go one step beyond. It is indeed a fearful crime in those placed in authority to bear themselves harshly or oppressively. There are few persons against whom more fearful judgments are denounced in God's word: still, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." Lawful ends are never to be sought by unlawful means.

We have most plain warrant of Scripture on this point: we have the example of our blessed Saviour Himself; and, that we may be sure we are using it rightly, we have it applied, in a very parallel instance, by His Apostle. "Servants," says St. Peter, "be subject to your masters with all fear;" (of course the same direction applies to the

bearing of subjects towards their rulers,) “not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.”

Thus, then, I have endeavoured to set forth the duties which we owe to those who are placed over us. I will gather together summarily the chief principles which have been laid down.

I. We are to submit ourselves, for the Lord’s sake, to those who are over us, in all cases where God’s law does not require the contrary.

II. Where man's law is opposed to God's, we are to obey God and not man.

III. But it behoves us, before we refuse our obedience to human laws on the plea that they are contrary to those of God, to be quite clear that they are so. And whereinsoever we are in doubt, and as long as we continue in doubt, we are to obey.

IV. We are to take meekly and patiently whatsoever hardships come upon us, whether in obeying such laws as are not expressly contrary to God's commandment, or in enduring penalties for withholding obedience from those which are.

And now I fear that some things which have been said may seem hard, and be felt greatly at variance with the standard which is commonly used in these matters. But the question for us to consider is, not whether they are agreeable to flesh and blood; not how they are approved when tried by man's rule; but how they are regarded by God—what is the course laid down for us in the Bible?

And truly there is that connected with every self-denying duty, which to the sincere Christian turns bitter into sweet. Is it not

sweet, that it is to be done “for the Lord’s sake?” Who counts the cost, when he is serving one whom he loves? For the Lord’s sake!—that Lord, who, for our sakes, left the glories of heaven, and became man, and submitted without a murmur to the most oppressive and cruel treatment at the hands of those in authority; yea, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross!

And this obedience of the Christian—obedience for the sake of Christ—sanctifies and ennobles the most common actions^b,

^b “Teach me, my God and King,

In all things Thee to see,
And, what I do in any thing,
To do it *as for Thee*.

“All may of Thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean,
Which, with this tincture, **FOR THY SAKE**,
Will not grow bright and clean.

“A servant with this clause,
Makes drudgery divine:
Who sweeps a room, as for Thy laws,
Makes that, and th’ action fine.

“This is the famous stone,
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch and own,
Cannot for less be told.”

George Herbert. “The Elixir.”

turns things civil and domestic into religious, causes a man, while he is submitting to his earthly superiors, to do God service, and makes him a confessor, or crowns him with a martyr's crown, when denying himself and taking up his cross, and submitting to any consequences whatsoever, rather than refuse obedience or resist authority.

But indeed it is the case with this, as with every other duty : that man will ever be the most ready to discharge it, and most consistent in discharging it, who is most under the influence of true religion. We shall never have an eye to God in all we do, we shall never meekly and patiently acquiesce, for the love of Christ, in all we suffer, unless God's Spirit rule within our hearts, and beat down and keep under the evil and perverse tendencies of our nature. The best Christian will ever be the best ruler, the best subject, the best father, the best child, the best master, the best servant.

God give us grace that our lives may be so holy and consistent, so fruitful in all good works—whether of piety towards God, or of charity and submission towards man—that those who see us may acknowledge that Christianity is not a name, but a reality.

There is only one stock on which such fruits can grow ; they must be the produce of the true vine, which is Christ Jesus, and our produce, by our being living branches of that vine—even “ the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God¹.” Would we abound in them ? Then let us remember and act upon our Lord’s words : “ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me. I am the vine, ye are the branches : he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit : for without Me ye can do nothing^k.”

¹ Phil. i. 18.

^k John xv. 4, 5.

SERMON XI.

THE CAVIL OF THE SADDUCEES ABOUT THE
RESURRECTION.

MATT. xxii. 32.

God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

ONE of the main points in dispute between the two principal sects among the Jews was, whether there is a future life after this. The Pharisees held that there is: the Sadducees, that there is not. The Pharisees held, that the soul still continues to live, after it is separated from the body: the Sadducees, that it is destroyed and annihilated.

We may think it strange, who have been taught, from our earliest childhood, to believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, that any such dispute could have arisen, especially among persons who had the Old Testament as their teacher. But indeed this is one of our peculiar privileges as Christians, that we live under a dis-

pensation in which life and immortality are plainly and clearly revealed. The Jews had abundant hints and notices of a future life, in their Scriptures, and these grew plainer and clearer as the coming of the Saviour drew nigh. And when Christ *did* come, and shed the blessed light of His Gospel upon them, and removed the darkness in which they had been involved, they stood out distinctly to view; insomuch that we, who read the Old Testament in that light, can see the doctrine of a future state and an eternal life after death sparkling and glistening in almost every page. But the Jews had not the light which we have to read the Old Testament with; they had not the rays of the Sun of righteousness streaming upon its letters. And therefore what to us is clear, was obscure and indistinct to them. It was reserved for the Christian dispensation to make a full, and unequivocal, and authoritative, revelation of a future state; which is what the Apostle means when he says, that Christ “brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel*.” Life and immortality were contained indeed in the Old Testament, but it was as objects in

* 2 Tim. i. 10.

a darkened room; Christ removed the darkness, and poured the full light of day upon what was before but obscurely visible.

It is our happiness then, as has been remarked, that we are taught the doctrine of a future life, in which it shall be well with the righteous, and fearful judgments shall be awarded to the ungodly, from our childhood, and no question is moved about it. Among the Jews, while those who had eyes to see what God had written, and ears to hear what God had spoken, could discern the truth plainly enough, there was yet enough of obscurity wrapped around it, to afford some sort of pretext to those who chose to blind their eyes and stop their ears. This was the case with the Sadducees. They said, "There is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit^b;" and probably the objection which they brought to our Lord, which we have just read, was one of their usual arguments, when they reasoned about the matter, and sought to maintain their own view. It was a law among the Jews, as we read in Deuteronomy xxv, that if a man should die, and leave a widow without children, his brother should marry his widow,

^b Acts xxiii. 8.

and the first-born child of that marriage should be accounted the child of the deceased, that his name might not be "put out of Israel." The Sadducees put the case, then, of a woman married in this way to seven husbands in succession, and dying at last without children by any of them; and they ask in triumph, and as though it were a question which admitted of no answer, whose wife she would be of the seven, in the next life, if there be a life after this? Strange that men, who could persuade themselves that there was weight in this foolish objection, should not be able to discern the real evidence which their Scriptures yielded to the doctrine which they were opposing; and yet not strange, for the same sort of thing happens continually. The same person will often be so sharp-sighted, that he can see frivolous objections, and start petty difficulties, which would never have occurred to those who have embraced the truth, and yet so dull-sighted, that he cannot discern the grave and weighty arguments which go to support the truth. Our Lord told these cavillers, that they erred from two causes: they knew not the Scriptures, neither the power of God. As touching God's power, they had

such low and unworthy thoughts of it, that they could not conceive of any other mode of existence than what they saw on earth, and had experience of. Marriage, they saw, is an indispensable part of the constituted order of things here. The world, as God has framed the world, could not go on without it. It is the appointed means of supplying the earth with inhabitants, and filling up the places of those who are removed by death. They could not conceive of a state of things in which marriage should be no longer necessary. If they had considered that the same Almighty Being, who ordained marriage for replenishing the earth, was able to fill the courts of heaven with a word, they would not have brought forward so frivolous an objection; they would not have thought it a thing incredible that God should raise the dead. "The children of this world," our Lord told them, "marry and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage, neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels." There will be no death

in heaven, no thinning of the ranks of its blessed inhabitants, and therefore no occasion for marriage. So far our Lord spoke with an eye to their ignorance of God's power. And as to their ignorance of the Scriptures, He reminded them of a passage with which they could not but be familiar. "Have ye not read what was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" If God calls Himself the God of these men, He must needs imply that they are still alive. He could not properly call Himself their God, if they were not. It would be to mock their memory, for God to call Himself their God, if yet He had suffered them to lack His protection, in that particular in which Divine power is most of all shewn. "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Though they are dead to us, they still live to Him. Such was our Lord's answer to these cavilling Sadducees: and the effect of it was to put them to silence, and to fill the by-standers with admiration at His wisdom.

And now to gather together such practical

instruction as God shall enable us from the passage we have been considering :

1. Observe, first, the causes to which our Lord ascribes the error of the Sadducees. 1st, Ignorance of the Scriptures. 2dly, Ignorance of God's power. And to this day, these causes, separately or jointly, keep thousands from the truth.

Men form their notions of God, and His character, and His way of acting, from what they see around them in the world, or rather from what they see around them in that narrow circumscribed portion of the world, across which their own sight reaches. They not only measure themselves by themselves, but God also. The gods, such as the heathens imagined them, were neither more nor less than men, except that they possessed super-human power, and therefore were able to do more good or more mischief, as their inclinations prompted them ; and their inclinations, it was supposed, prompted them to do mischief oftener than good. Those who live in Christian lands, even though their own hearts may have experienced no direct influence from Christianity, are still preserved, by its indirect influence, from running such

lengths as this. Yet, even among them, what low and unworthy thoughts of God prevail! Some imagine Him practically to be such a Being as they wish,—all mercy and indulgence,—insomuch that they will not believe that He will condemn any, at all events, none but the most notorious sinners, to eternal punishment. Others again imagine Him to be such a Being as their fears dictate,—all terror, and delighting in vengeance. Others again, and these a vast number, practically believe that He does not concern Himself in men's affairs, but leaves matters to take their own course; and so they deny His providence. Thus men err, because they know not, or do not consider, the power of God. And yet even natural reason, apart from revelation, has light enough, where men do not wilfully shut their eyes, to discern much truth respecting His character. As the Apostle says, “the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead^d.”

But if men err from ignorance of God's power, or from want of consideration of it,

^d Rom. i. 20.

still more do they err from not knowing the Scriptures. Much of divine and heavenly truth must needs be wholly beyond the reach of unassisted reason; and if God had not been pleased to reveal it to us by the Scriptures, it must have remained hidden from us for ever. The Bible is the great storehouse of religious knowledge. Therein is contained whatever is needful for us to know, in order to our attaining everlasting life. But if men slight the Bible; if they will not receive what it teaches, or if they will not be at the pains to search into it; they shut themselves out from the only avenue that lies open to them for becoming wise unto salvation. No man could have found out, by himself, and without divine teaching, how he might obtain forgiveness of sin; or how he might obtain power to serve God acceptably; or that there is a Mediator provided for us; or whether there be any Holy Ghost; or what becomes of the soul after death; whether, in fact, it survives the body, or whether it is annihilated the moment it leaves the body. These and other great and important truths we should never have known, or never have known with

any certainty, but for the Scriptures. And even as it is, numbers, though they live in a Christian land, do not receive them, or do not at any rate fully and cordially receive them, because they do not receive, or do not fully and cordially receive, the testimony of the Scriptures concerning them. They still err, as the Sadducees did of old, "not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God."

And what a strong and constraining reason does this suggest, my brethren, for the diligent, teachable, obedient, devout, study of God's holy word! We may rest assured, this is the grand means of guarding us against the errors which surround us on all sides; both errors in doctrine, and errors in practice; errors which are floating, if one may so say, in the atmosphere in which we live, and which nothing but familiarity with God's word, and the having our minds impregnated with it, so to speak, will preserve us from imbibing. Only let us remember, that it is not merely head knowledge that we want; it is such a knowledge as is acquired by prayer, and is turned, as we acquire it, to practice.

There is one circumstance in the passage

we have before us, which may make us understand further what need we have both of humility and of pains-taking, in our reading of the Scriptures. A careful and thoughtful study of the words which our Saviour quoted to the Sadducees will shew us that they contain the doctrine which He pointed out in them. But the most persons, if He had not pointed it out, would hardly have discovered it there. And now that we have our Lord's comment, and with that His express declaration, over and over again made, that there is another life after this, we may see the doctrine, as has been already observed, sparkling and glistening all along the course of the Old Testament, only with increasing brightness as the Gospel day draws nigh; the Prophets declaring in express words what the Law had only hinted at. And may we not expect that there are other truths, besides this, contained in the Old Testament, which at first sight perhaps might escape our notice, but which diligent and intelligent study, with the New Testament for our guide, will bring out to view? Certainly, if we will not be content to study Scripture with diligence and intelligence, whether the Old Testament or

the New, we cannot expect to derive the profit from it which God designed it to convey. The Bible is God's book, and it both requires and deserves all the pains we can bestow upon it. And if we will not bestow pains, we shew neither due reverence to Him whose book it is, nor regard for our own welfare.

Another point to notice in connexion with the passage we have been reading, though I have already touched upon it, is the blessed certainty which we have respecting another life after this. It is no matter of question, which some may argue one way and some another, whether God will raise the dead. No article of our belief is revealed more clearly, or established more surely. Among the Heathens all was vague and uncertain on this point. Wise and thoughtful men among them guessed and conjectured that there might be a future life; but no one could affirm any thing positively. When they committed the bodies of their departed friends to the grave, or burnt them, as was their custom in many cases, on the funeral pile, or when they looked forward to their own departure, all was dark, and dreary, and cheerless. No

wonder that such a proverb, as the one St. Paul refers to, should be in repute among them, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die*;" let us enjoy life while we may, for there is nothing beyond. And though the Jews had a brighter hope, and really good men among them did discern glimpses of a happy existence hereafter, and died in faith, as the Apostle to the Hebrews beautifully expresses it, not having received the promises which God had made them, in this present life, but having seen them afar off, even across the dark valley of the shadow of death, and were persuaded of them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Yet even so, how far clearer, and more distinct, and brighter, is the Christian's view, to whom eternal life is revealed in the most express terms!

And is not this a call upon us to walk more holily and religiously, than they to whom such motives as we have were not held out? Let us take heed that there be not numbers, I do not say from among the Jews, but even from among the Heathens,

* 1 Cor. xv. 32. Not however that it was confined to the Heathens. See Isai. xxii. 13. and Wisd. ii.

who shall be found at the last day to have served God more truly, to have obeyed His laws more faithfully, even with the little light they had, than we with ours.

There is another point which deserves our special notice,—the account which our Lord gives us of the nature and condition of the blessed saints hereafter. “The children of this world,” He says, “marry and are given in marriage; but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage, neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto, (that is, they are as,) the angels.”

Observe these two points: 1st, The life they have is an angelical life. 2dly, It is an immortal, undying, never-ending life.

1. They neither marry nor are given in marriage. They will know no more the wants and necessities, the joys and delights, the affections and desires, of this present life, save those only which are spiritual. All that is earthly, carnal, sensual, will be done away. Bodies they will have, as the Apostle teaches us, but spiritual bodies: and their wants will be spiritual. How different a

view does this give us of the future state, from what they who know not the Gospel have dreamed, when they have in any wise entertained the thought of a future state ! And yet how well does it commend itself even to our reason, when once it is revealed to us. And should not such a view lead us to aim, even here, at cultivating those tastes and habits, which will survive the body, and abide with us throughout eternity ? How can they think they are making preparation for heaven, whose only pleasures are those of time and sense, even though they be free from what the world accounts sins ?

2. And that blessed life, which the saints live in heaven, is an immortal life. They can die no more. Death, the last enemy of our race, shall be destroyed. O what a happy feature in the prospect ! All kinds of pure and holy joys, and those for ever ! No fear of their being torn from us, or of our being torn from them. We shall dwell in God's presence, if only, through Christ's infinite merits, we be once admitted to it, through all eternity.

But, on the other hand, that which forms so blessed a circumstance in the happiness of God's saints, yea which crowns their

happiness, adds infinite intensity to the misery of the ungodly. If the one cannot die any more, so neither can the other. If the happiness of the godly shall flow on unceasingly for ever, so also shall the misery of the wicked. It will have no end. To them death would be the greatest boon that could be given them; they will long to die, and call upon death to deliver them from their anguish, but their cries will not be heard. They can die no more, but must live on for ever, to bewail their folly, and to reproach themselves for their neglect of God.

There is but one other point which I would notice, and that is, the comfort which God holds out to us, in permitting us to call Him our God. For such indeed He does permit us to call Him, and such He calls Himself, as truly as He did in the case of the Patriarchs of old. When He called Himself the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, He implied that they were still alive, though long since removed from the earth. He would not have dealt by them in a manner worthy of Himself, and of the relationship into which He had brought them, if He had suffered them to pass away, and become annihilated.

And this seems to be the drift of the Apostle's argument in Heb. xi. where, after speaking of the faith and patience of the Patriarchs in the land of their pilgrimage, he adds, "Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city,"—a heavenly city;—as though, if He had not provided for them so well in the next world, considering how ill they sped in this, He would have been ashamed to be called their God; but now He is not, having done that for them which answers it in its true and full meaning^f.

See then, my dear brethren, the comfort which there is in that blessed relationship, into which God in Christ hath admitted us, first, as regards our departed friends, and then as regards ourselves.

Were our departed friends God's servants of a truth? Did they live and die in His fear? Were they one with Him, because one with His Son Jesus Christ? Then may we dismiss all anxious care respecting them. God is their God still; and He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Though they are dead to us, they live to Him whom they feared, and loved, and served,

^f See Matthew Henry on Matt. xxii. 32.

while they lived on earth. Well therefore may we comfort one another with these words.

And as to ourselves : If God is our God now, and that He surely is, in Christ, unless we have renounced His service and fallen away from His fear, then is He ours for ever ; and He will deal by us in all respects as becomes the relationship. He will guide us by His counsel here, and afterwards receive us into glory. The very name, “ our God,” by which He allows us to call Him, is our pledge, and security, and guarantee, that He will never leave us nor forsake us, until He have done for us all the good things which He hath promised to His people.

SERMON XII.

SLOTH.

2 CHRON. xxxi. 21.

In every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.

SUCH is the account which Scripture gives of Hezekiah's reformation. That good king entered upon his reign at a time when religion was in sad decay. He came after one of the worst princes that ever sat on the throne of Judah. He found the house of God shut up, the worship of God laid aside, and idolatrous altars established in every corner of Jerusalem, and in every city throughout the land. Yet he was no sooner made king, than he set himself in good earnest to reform these abuses, and to bring his people back to their allegiance to the God of their fathers. He had many

difficulties to contend with. When wickedness has been suffered to gather strength, it is no easy task to put it down. Yet he was not disheartened, he did not give way to sloth. On the contrary, he set himself to the work to which he saw God had called him, and he did it with all his heart, and prospered.

My dear brethren, we too have a great work lying before us. We have, each of us, a soul to save, a heaven to win, an evil and corrupt nature to subdue. And this work requires all the pains and all the energy we can put forth. There is no hindrance in the way of men's salvation more frequent or more fatal than sloth. No tongue can tell the multitudes whom it has kept from entering upon the road to life, or whom, after they have entered upon it, it has hampered in their course, and made them pursue their way feebly and languidly, and prevented them from reaching those attainments in holiness, which they ought to have reached; it may be, has caused them to turn back from their undertaking, and yield themselves to be once more the servants of Satan, so that their last end has been worse than the first.

What more common than for Christians to complain of the little progress they make

in the divine life, of the strength of sin, of the power of evil habits, of the absence of the peace, and cheerfulness, and holy joy, which Scripture so often sets before us as the inheritance of God's children? No cause more frequent, none more effectual, than sloth. Men shrink from the labour and diligence which are necessary. They act as if that which is the hardest and most difficult, as well as the most important, work we can take in hand, were the easiest; as if wishing or complaining would bring us to heaven, and make us meet for the company of angels and the presence of God: whereas, in fact, it requires all the pains we can bestow, and all the energies we can put forth; and it deserves them too.

I purpose, with God's help, to direct your thoughts and my own to this subject; first, pointing out some of the forms under which sloth shews itself; and then suggesting some considerations, such as, with God's blessing, may serve to stir us up to struggle against it; so that, after the example of the good king of whom we have heard, whatsoever work we take in hand in our Master's cause, we may do it with all our heart, and prosper.

I. First then, as to the forms under which sloth shews itself :

i. My object is to consider sloth in reference to the concerns of another world—spiritual sloth : yet it may not be amiss to speak of it briefly as regards the things of this life. This will help us perhaps the more clearly to discern its workings in the affairs of the soul.

The slothful man then is one who dislikes work. He fancies that he should not dislike it, if he were in some other situation, and had other work to do ; but, the truth is, he dislikes work altogether. He might indeed for a few days labour diligently in a new employment ; but it would be only while it was new. When the novelty had worn off, he would fall back into his old habits, and be as slothful as before.

And as he dislikes work, so he never works when he can help. And when he does work, he works in such an indolent and loitering way, or else so hurries over his task, that it is plain he is thinking more of his wages than of his labour ; is more anxious to finish what he has to do, than to do it well : so that there is no trusting him, when his master's eye is not upon him. The

consequence is, that he is often in want. No one will employ him, when any one else can be had. And thus he is a burthen to himself, to his family, and to his neighbours.

Such is sloth, as it shews itself in those whose living depends upon their daily labour. But sloth is confined to no one class. Indeed, if there be any who are more prone to it, because they have stronger temptations to it, than others, they are those whose circumstances place them above the necessity of labour. And it is one of the crying sins of numbers of this description; and what makes the matter worse, it is not looked upon as a sin. And yet indeed it is a sin, and the parent of many other sins. Satan has too much employment ready at hand to suffer those who are not otherwise employed to remain unoccupied. That is a true verse in the child's hymn,

“Satan finds some mischief still,
For idle hands to do.”

There are many warnings against this vice in the book of Proverbs. It seems to have drawn the wise king's attention to itself very pointedly. “Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep, and an idle soul shall

suffer hunger^a.” “ The desire of the slothful killeth him, for his hands refuse to labour. He coveteth greedily all the day long ;” that is, he pines with longing for bread, which he is too idle to work for^b. “ The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing : but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat^c.”

I will add no more on this head of slothfulness in respect of our worldly occupations, save only one remark, which I would press home upon the serious consideration of all whom it may concern. He that is slothful in the affairs of this life, can hardly fail to be slothful in the affairs of the next. There is something so infectious in the very nature of sloth, that, once admitted, it spreads itself over the whole system of our duties. A man may, it is true, be industrious enough in his worldly affairs, and yet neglect his soul altogether : but I fear it is rare indeed to find one who is indolent in the proper work of his calling, who is not, at the same time, a sluggard in the care of his soul. Indeed, indolence in the work of one's calling is itself a branch of spiritual indolence. For the work of one's calling is in

^a Prov. xix. 15. ^b Prov. xxi. 25, 26. ^c Prov. xiii. 4.

reality a part of one's duty to God, and is to be done, according to the Apostle's direction, "heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men^d."

ii. But to pass on to the consideration of sloth, as it more directly concerns the affairs of another life—spiritual sloth :

We may consider it, as it shews itself in two different classes of persons ; first, in those who are strangers to religion, and have never deliberately and of set purpose striven to walk in the ways of God ; secondly, in those who have taken some steps towards preparation for heaven.

1. Sloth is one of the main hindrances which keep men from turning to God. It is of the very essence of sloth to love present ease, and to throw aside all care for future consequences, so it be left undisturbed now. "A little more sleep, a little more slumber, come what will ;" this is its language, its very mother tongue. Men do not like to be disturbed. They know that a religious life is one of much self-denial ; and they suffer their minds to dwell upon the disagreeableness which they believe to be connected with it, till they shrink from

^d Coloss. iii. 23.

the thought of entering upon it. They would not indeed deliberately resolve never to become God's servants: nay, they promise themselves that some day or other they shall be so in good earnest; though probably they have so often made the promise, and so often put off the performance of it to a future day, that they begin to doubt their own words. Still they live on with a kind of vague indistinct hope. They try indeed as much as they can to banish the subject from their thoughts altogether. But whenever it is forced upon their minds, for conscience will be heard sometimes, they are quick at finding out excuses. "Just now they are particularly occupied; they are exposed to very strong temptations; it may be well enough for some persons to enter upon a religious course, but their case is different; and they hope God will make allowances: at all events, they cannot attend to the subject now." Thus it is; sloth casts its chains around them, and binds them down to earth. Oh with what fearful meaning does that description in the Proverbs bear upon such cases! "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man

void of understanding : and, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down : (that is, his soul was neglected and uncared for.) Then I saw, and considered it well ; I looked upon it, and received instruction. Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep ; so shall thy poverty (thine eternal poverty) come as one that travelleth ; and thy want (thy want of heaven and happiness) as an armed man*.” Oh, my dear brethren, whosoever among you are in this sad case, slothfully neglecting your souls, while you know in your hearts, and perhaps confess with your mouths, that you ought to live otherwise, may God give you grace to rouse yourselves from your dangerous slumber. What ! do you love your ease so much ; and yet will you, for the sake of a few days or years of present enjoyment, if it may be called enjoyment, forfeit an eternal rest in the presence of God ? Awake, and shake off your sloth, ere it be too late. Every hour you delay only makes the work more difficult, and more unlikely to be accomplished.

* Prov. xxiv. 30—34.

“ Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

2. But I turn to those, who have entered upon the heavenward road. Let me endeavour to point out some of the forms in which sloth shews itself in these. Perhaps there is no one who does not, more or less, feel its unhappy influence, though some, by God’s grace, struggle against it and resist it, and make progress in the divine life in spite of it; whilst others are first impeded in their course, and then overpowered and bound down by the strong arm of Satan.

I fear such a case as the following is by no means uncommon. Here is a man who once set out in good earnest in the ways of God. For a time, things seemed to prosper with him. He abandoned his evil courses, he forsook his ungodly companions, he gained the victory in many instances over temptations by which he had been used to be overcome. But by degrees his zeal has grown cold; he has lost his interest in God’s service; little temptations have been yielded to; the voice of conscience has been disregarded; his peace and joy are fled; he is unhappy, and yet he is too

indolent to arouse himself, and retrace his steps. This is a fearful case indeed: it is the first beginning of what, in too many instances, has ended in indifference or apostasy. If there be any present who are conscious that they have themselves fallen into this deplorable state, let them be assured they have no time to lose. They are in a downward course; and, if their progress is not arrested, they will only fall more and more rapidly, till they are precipitated into that gulf from which there is no escape. But, blessed be God, it is not yet too late. There is still grace for them, if they will but seek it. God is still ready to receive His returning children, and to welcome them to His bosom, if they will but come to Him, confessing their folly, and seeking forgiveness in Christ's name, with hearty sorrow for the past, and earnest purposes, in Christ's strength, of amendment for the future. And once reconciled, they shall again receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, to subdue the evil that is within them, and to enable them to make progress in the divine life.

I have spoken of sloth in general: let me come to some particulars.

One of the first duties in which indolence shews itself is that of Prayer. Not that prayer is neglected; a man must be far gone indeed to have arrived at this point; but that it is hurried over, or is full of distractions, the thoughts being suffered to wander at will, without any settled and steadfast attempts to check their wanderings. When this state of things becomes habitual, and is allowed without compunction, and acquiesced in as if it were what could not be avoided, the Christian has good cause to take the alarm. No one can stand his ground, let his attainments be what they may, who becomes remiss in prayer.

Another form of sloth is the ceasing to maintain a constant watchfulness over the heart, the thoughts, the tongue, throughout the day. I fear the very mention of such a thing, as though it were a duty, will seem strangely strict to those who have not considered the spirit and temper of our holy religion; but it is no more than our blessed Lord enjoined, when He bade His disciples "Watch," or His apostle, when he wrote, "Be sober, be vigilant." To maintain this watchfulness indeed, to be habitually recollected, ever mindful of God's

presence, and careful to approve ourselves in our Master's sight, to keep up continual communion, in the exercise of prayer and praise, with our Father which is in heaven, is no easy task; but it depends mainly, under God, upon the pains we take in it, whether we advance in the divine life, or the contrary. Diligence is as necessary to proficiency in spiritual attainments as to proficiency in secular. And he who will not exercise it in the one, has no more prospect of success than he who will not exercise it in the other.

Closely connected with the last-mentioned form of sloth, is the forbearing to offer a prompt and vigorous resistance to temptation at its first onset. Men trifle upon the verge of danger. Evil thoughts are admitted which ought to have been cast out, and not suffered to gain an entrance for a moment. When the plain and straightforward course of duty lies before them, they allow themselves to debate the point, whether some other course is not equally allowable. Little sins, as they are called, are indulged, on the plea that they are little; and these open the way for greater. Undue concessions are made

to the world, in spite of the remonstrances of conscience ; and one concession leads to another, till every barrier is thrown down.

Another way in which sloth manifests itself is in neglecting present opportunities of serving God and doing good to our neighbour. I say, *present* opportunities ; because it is, as has been already observed, of the very nature of sloth to thrust aside the burthen from the present hour, without caring how much is stored up for a future time. Present opportunities then are neglected. Some plea or other is easily found : either the work to be done is unseasonable just at this time ; or, there are peculiar hindrances or difficulties in the way ; or, we shall have more leisure bye and bye. And yet, in all probability, our sloth will have the same excuses in readiness on the next occasion. In this way many put off from time to time attending at the Lord's Table. There is always some obstacle to prevent them : they cannot well come at present ; but they will consider the matter ; while yet they know in their hearts that they are only shaking off an irksome subject, without any serious intention of altering their conduct.

Another way in which sloth manifests itself is in a general want of energy, the doing what we have to do perfunctorily and by halves; spreading over several hours the work which might, with right management, have been done in one. I have already instanced this in the case of prayer: but it might be instanced in a hundred others. A man sits down, for example, to read his Bible: presently some irrelevant subject occurs to him; his thoughts wander off in pursuit of it. Then he calls them back, and proceeds with what he has in hand. Again he is diverted, and again returns. It is the same in every thing. If we were to estimate the length of men's lives by the quantity of work done in them, we should find that some live a longer life in thirty years than others in sixty.

I will mention but one other form under which sloth shews itself. This is the healing over the wounds of sin hastily and slightly; not searching and probing them: or, in other words, applying to our souls the consolations of the Gospel, while yet sin is not heartily repented of and renounced. If this were not done, it would be impossible that so many, who, it is to be feared, have

but slender grounds for such confidence, could look forward to death, with an assurance of their future safety, such as ordinarily could be expected from those only who have persevered in a long course of consistent obedience. But for the most part we readily believe what we wish ; and this should make us the more suspicious of ourselves in a matter where our interest is so nearly concerned. It is true, indeed, that Christ is an ever-present Saviour to those who truly turn to Him, let them turn to Him at what hour they will, and let their past transgressions have been what they may. But then none can be said to turn to Him truly, who yet so love their sins, that they are not willing to renounce them for His sake. Repentance and faith go hand in hand ; and where the one is not, the other cannot be.

II. Let this suffice for the forms under which sloth shews itself. It would be easy to enlarge upon the unhappiness which this vice occasions. Its full consequences indeed will never be known here ; but yet it has enough even of present wretchedness to startle the most slothful from his slumber, if he would but consider it. I would rather

turn, however, to the opposite picture, and point out, however briefly and imperfectly, the blessedness of those, who, by God's grace, are enabled to shake off the chains which sloth would cast around them, and, like Hezekiah, to do whatsoever work they undertake in God's cause with all their heart, and prosper.

In one word then, the soul is then most healthy, and consequently most happy, when it is most vigorous and active. Yes; if we would find a Christian who is eminently cheerful, and who adorns the doctrine which he professes not more by his good works, than by the peace and joy, which, like a perpetual sunshine, abide upon him, we must seek for him among those who are diligently devoting themselves to their Master's service, doing whatsoever their hands find to do, and doing it with all their might. No doubt, a large measure of the gloom, and sullenness, and moroseness, and evil tempers, which too often disgrace men's Christian profession, is to be ascribed to sloth.

Again, it might seem almost too obvious to be mentioned, that our progress in holiness will always be proportioned to our diligence. And yet men are apt to speak of

great attainments in the divine life, as though they proceeded from some happy temperament in those who have reached them, or as if they were the fruits of grace, which only a favoured few can look for. But let us search into the histories of God's people, and we shall find that never was any one eminently holy, who was not also eminently diligent. Holiness indeed is God's gift, the work of His Spirit; but then it is given to those only who diligently seek it. And it is as true in spiritual things as in temporal, that while "the soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing," "the soul of the diligent shall be made fat." Thus much for the reward of diligence, while the servant of God is yet on earth. With regard to its recompense hereafter, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; but this we are told, that while he, who has neglected to improve the talents entrusted to him, will be condemned, as a "wicked and slothful servant," to eternal banishment from God's presence, he, who has pursued the opposite course, will be commended, as "a good and faithful servant," and bidden to "enter into the joy of his Lord^s."

^f Prov. xiii. 4.

^s Matt. xxv. 14—30.

Do we long for this commendation, my brethren ? Do we desire to be found hereafter among the blessed company of Christ's faithful and true servants ? Then here are a few suggestions which it may be of use to us to attend to :

1. Let us take heed that we rest not satisfied with mere desires. Oh how many have desired heaven and holiness, or, like Balaam, have longed to die the death of the righteous, who yet have stopped short with empty wishes. The road to hell is strewn with such indolent longings. If we would indeed reach heaven, let us shew that we are in earnest, by arising without delay and setting out in pursuit of it ; or, let me rather say, by betaking ourselves to God in prayer, confessing before Him our past negligence, imploring forgiveness in Christ's name, and beseeching Him to pour down upon us His Holy Spirit, to quicken us for His service, and to fill our souls with energy and perseverance.

2. Further, let us be content to wait for rest till we reach heaven. Here we have no abiding place. We are engaged in unceasing warfare with an enemy who is ever watching to take advantage of our remiss-

ness or inadvertency. But there remaineth a rest for the people of God, and that rest an eternal rest. Surely we may cheerfully labour for the few remaining years that may be allotted to us, when such a glorious termination is in prospect.

3. And this indeed is another point: Let us keep that termination in view. Let our thoughts be often dwelling upon it. Let us familiarize our minds with the blessedness which is in store for God's servants, such as Scripture has represented it to us; to be for ever with the Lord, seeing Him as He is, and being made like unto Him, perfectly holy and perfectly happy. Surely a believing view of these things, if habitually before our eyes, would be an effectual preservative against sloth.

4. Once more: let us study the lives of God's saints. It is always an incitement to exertion, to find that others have pursued, and pursued successfully, the same course to which we are called. This makes biography so useful. The eleventh chapter of the Hebrews contains a collection of examples, gathered together for the express purpose of stirring up those to whom the Epistle was written, to run with patience

the same race of holy faithfulness, looking, above all others, at the great pattern and exemplar, Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

5. Lastly, If we would indeed enter upon a course of earnest diligence, let us begin by being diligent in Prayer. This is the great secret of success, we may rest assured. And if we find that the spirit of sloth meets us, as doubtless it will, here also, let us turn this likewise into matter of supplication; and if we have ill success to-day, let us return again to-morrow, and the next day, and the next, remembering Who hath taught us, “that men ought always to pray, and not to faint^h.”

^h Luke xviii. 1.

SERMON XIII.

JOSIAH: CONSISTENCY THE TEST OF SINCERITY.

Preached on the 18th Sunday after Trinity.

2 KINGS xxiii. 25.

And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him.

LAST Sunday, we had our attention called to the character of Jehu, king of Israel. And we saw in him, how a man may go some way in executing God's will, and fulfilling God's purposes, even so as to seem to others, and perhaps to himself, to have a zeal for God, and yet prove a miserable time-server, without one spark of real religion, after all. Jehu's zeal for God shewed well, and looked like godly zeal, as long as his duty and his inclination ran together; but no sooner did they take

different directions, than it became plain by which of the two he was actuated. His zeal for God proved to be neither more nor less than zeal for himself under the cloak of religion.

The lessons for to-day have brought two persons, very opposite in character to Jehu, before us—Hezekiah, and Josiah—princes who really were, what Jehu pretended to be. I shall take the history of the last-mentioned of these; and the one point which I shall endeavour to keep in view, in going through it, shall be to trace out the marks of earnest, true-hearted, sincerity, which it affords.

The character, which the word of God gives of Josiah, is, that “he turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses”—the very reverse of the character of Jehu, drawn by the same unerring hand, that, in spite of his seeming zeal in some things “he took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart; for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin^a.” As Jehu’s history exempli-

^a 2 Kings x. 31.

fies and confirms the character given of Jehu, so does Josiah's the character given of Josiah.

Josiah was the son of a very wicked prince, who forsook the Lord God of his fathers, and set up idols, and worshipped them^b. He became king, when he was but eight years old, and he died at the age of thirty-nine; so that his course was not a long one: but it was, from beginning to end, a consistent course of faithful devotedness to God's service. "He turned not aside to the right hand or to the left;"—so the sacred historian testifies of him, when he first enters upon his history.

And here we see very strikingly the contrast between Josiah and Jehu. Jehu did not indeed, if one may so say, turn aside to the right hand; but to the left he did most grievously. As far as the worship of Baal was concerned, he kept himself free from reproach. He not only took no part in it, but he destroyed it, root and branch. But the golden calves which were in Bethel and in Dan, these had their full share of his encouragement. But Josiah held on the even tenour of his way. Neither Baal, on

^b 2 Kings xxi. 20—22.

the one hand, nor the golden calves of Samaria, on the other, could seduce him. He went straight forward, having but one aim, to approve himself in the sight of God.

It is a high praise to have turned aside neither to the right hand nor to the left ; to have been thoroughly consistent. Yet the Christian must aim at nothing short of it. He that is content with aiming short of it is no Christian, in the strictest sense of the word. He is not a Christian in heart, whatever he may be in name. " Whosoever shall keep the whole law," says St. James, " and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law*." And the same is true, though the sins instanced be less heinous than these. A man may say, I am no drunkard, I pay every one his own, I try to train up my children in soberness and honesty. Well : thank God it is so. But perhaps you can make use of an oath at times, or you can allow yourself to harbour an unforgiving spirit, or you can take an unfair advantage of a man

* James ii. 10, 11.

and boast of it when it is taken, or you can live in the neglect of that holy Sacrament which our Lord enjoined upon our observance with His dying breath : what is this but to allow yourself to turn aside to the left hand, how careful soever you may be not to turn aside to the right? And yet God will have you go straight forward, and turn aside to neither. It is true, no man on earth reaches such a point, that he does not turn aside in any instance, or in any measure. The best man comes short—very far short—of the high and holy standard of God's law. But the Christian aims at nothing less, allows himself in nothing less, than entire conformity to it.

Josiah began his upright course very early in life. “ In the eighth year of his reign,” says the sacred historian, “ while he was yet young, (that is, when he was but fifteen or sixteen years old,) he began to seek after the God of David his father^d.” Yes, he sought God early, and, according to God's express promise, he found Him^e.

And happy indeed are they, who, by God's grace, are thus led to seek God, “ while they are yet young.” Some persons

^d 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3.

^e Prov. viii. 17.

seem to think, that, as long as a man really turns to God, it is no matter what sort of life he led in his youth. Perhaps the greater the sinner, the greater the saint. Very sure I am, that they who can speak thus, know very little either of the hateful bitterness of sin, or of the paramount claim which God has upon us for the devoted obedience of our whole lives, or of the blessedness of religion, as these are felt by the sincere and earnest Christian. No doubt, if a man truly and heartily turns to God, through Christ, however late in life, he is accepted and forgiven for Christ's sake. Manasseh, the grandfather of Josiah, whose history we have now before us, is a very signal instance of this : and his conversion is left on record, that those who have grown old in sin may be encouraged to do the best thing, that under their circumstances remains for them, turn to God, even in the decline of life. But even if a man could be sure that he would turn to God in the decline of life, which yet no man can, it would be far better for him to do so in his youth.

It is a very great mistake that people make, and a very common one, to think, that, if we can only have our sins forgiven,

that is the main thing to be looked to. And there are numbers, who, when their friends are lying on their dying beds, are satisfied, if they can catch some strong and confident expressions from their lips, such as that "they are going to heaven," and that "they die happy," even though, up to that time, they have shewn no signs of real conversion, no loathing of sin, no forsaking of it, no earnest following after righteousness. God forbid that any man should lift that curtain, which God has spread before the unseen world. As far as others are concerned, it behoves us always to think charitably, and hope for the best. But for ourselves, these are poor and unsatisfactory grounds of comfort—poor and unsatisfactory for this reason, because they afford no certain proof of a penitent and contrite heart, which is such a necessary accompaniment of a living faith, that there is no such thing as a living faith without it. But to return to what I was saying, that it is a great and a common mistake to think, that if we can only have our sins forgiven, that is the main thing to be looked to. Scripture sets a very different prospect before us. Forgiveness it represents as the first beginning of our

Christian course. We are received by God as His pardoned and accepted children, as soon as ever we truly turn to Him in Christ. But then it is that we may go forward, fighting the good fight of faith, striving manfully against sin, subduing the evil that is within us, our evil tempers, evil lusts, evil passions, and growing in holiness and in conformity to Christ's image. This is what God has called us to. And though, as far as any merits and deserts of ours are concerned, the very holiest of God's saints can plead nothing of his own, and so can stand upon no higher footing than the least who shall be admitted into the kingdom, (Christ's merits being the one only ground of acceptance for all;) yet doubtless, in that day when God shall reward every man according to his works, he that has best improved the talents which have been entrusted to him shall be set the highest; he that has made the greatest progress in holiness, shall be placed the nearest to that Saviour to whose likeness he is most closely conformed.

The earlier then any one begins the Christian course, the farther he is likely to advance, if only he goes forward steadily and consistently; and I may say too, the

greater are the advantages with which he sets out, to begin with. For though we all bring a sinful nature into the world with us, yet no doubt the actual tendency to sin is increased and strengthened every year a man lives in the indulgence of sin. A stone will fall towards the earth the instant you drop it from your hand, but it will fall far faster and with far greater force if it has been dropped from a great height, and has been falling for some seconds.

Let the young then lay this to heart, and strive, like young Josiah, to consecrate their earliest years to God, and to walk before Him in consistency, and in increasing conformity to their Saviour's image, all their days. I say this to all young persons, I say it especially to those who were so lately confirmed. O, my dear young friends, if there were any serious impressions upon your minds at that time, as I trust there were upon the minds of some of you, take heed that they be not worn off. Quench not that holy fire which God's Spirit kindled within your breasts. Go forward in the blessed ways of God : turn not aside either to the right hand or to the left : and consecrate the best and choicest portion of

your days to Him who gave His well-beloved Son for you. Let others pursue their wild mad course of wickedness and folly, or their not less perilous course of indifference about God and their souls : be it your care and aim to have God for your portion ; and His favour, which is better than life, for your reward ; and His service, which is perfect freedom, for your happy employment all your days ; and His presence, in which is the fulness of joy, for your abode for ever.

But to return to Josiah : The first particular that is recorded of his zeal for God is his setting himself to purge his kingdom from the idolatry that had overspread it. In the twelfth year of his reign, that is, in the twentieth year of his age, “ he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images. And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence ; and the images that were on high above them he cut down. . . . And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars ; and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem : and so did he in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali. And when he had broken down the altars and

the groves, and had beaten the graven images into powder, and had cut down all the idols throughout all the land of Israel, he returned to Jerusalem^f." Thus he set himself to root out idolatry from his kingdom, and not from his own kingdom only, but from the adjoining country which had formerly been the habitation of the ten tribes, and in which the remnants of them still dwelt. In all this Josiah's conduct was such as indicated a thorough zeal for God. And though it would not have been safe to judge of him by one particular instance, or one particular course of action, as Jehu's history has taught us, yet we may take notice, that there are none of those circumstances which threw suspicion upon Jehu's proceedings even before he had had time to shew his real character. Jehu wished to attract men's notice to his "zeal for the Lord," as he called it. There is nothing of this recorded of Josiah. For all that appears, he thought only of God's approbation, and of discharging the duties, painful as they were, of the high office in which God had placed him. However, as was observed, we cannot safely judge either of

^f 2 Chron. xxxiv. 3—7.

others or of ourselves by single actions, or even by single courses of action. Consistency is the grand test of sincerity ; and we shall see that Josiah's conduct was of a piece throughout.

His next step that we read of was to repair the house of the Lord which had been suffered to fall into decay, while the people had been building altars and setting up images to their false Gods all over the land. Here Jehu's zeal had stopped short ; zealous as he was to get rid of Baal, not one step did he take towards restoring the worship of the living and true God : Josiah's zeal manifested itself in both. And though even two instances would not have been sufficient, had nothing more appeared, to stamp his character beyond all doubt as the character of a truly religious man, yet the second was one step further in the way of consistency, and a very great step. It shewed at any rate, as far as regarded the outward act of worship, that he was disposed to turn aside neither to the right hand nor to the left. When he took away one idol, there was no other idol which he wished to retain or substitute in its place. He was resolved to serve the LORD, and the LORD only.

I must not stay now to enlarge further upon Josiah's care to put the house of God in fit and seemly order; I will only remark in passing, that where there is a real zeal for God, that zeal will shew itself, if it have opportunity, in a regard even for the outward decency and propriety of God's house and service. It is an ill sign, if we think any thing good enough in these respects.

Josiah then, as we have seen, set himself to repair the house of God, which had been suffered to fall into decay. While the work was going on, a circumstance happened, which gave a fresh occasion for putting his religion to the test. A book was found in a neglected corner of the temple. This was no other than the book of the Law, the Scriptures, or at any rate an important part of the Scriptures, so far as they were then written. There it had lain neglected and forgotten; insomuch that neither the high priest who found it, nor the king to whom it was brought, seemed ever to have seen it before. And yet it was the business of every priest to be thoroughly acquainted with it; and it was the king's duty to write out a copy of it for his own use, and to read in it daily. No wonder, when God's

law was thus thrown into a corner, and lay there unopened and unread, that wickedness overspread the land. It would be the same among ourselves, if that blessed book should ever come to be dealt with in like manner.

The book which had been found was brought to the king, and the king had it read to him. And when he heard what was written in it—heard, for instance, how it both foretold and condemned the iniquity which had overspread the land, and denounced God's heavy judgments upon the guilty—he rent his clothes, in token of his deep concern; and he sent his servants, saying, “Go ye, enquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us.”

Here then, I say, was a still further proof of Josiah's sincerity, and perhaps the surest proof which we have yet seen—his deep reverence for God's word, and his conscientious quickness in applying it to him-

* 2 Kings xxii. 13.

self. Considering the zeal which he had shewn in putting down idolatry and in repairing the house of God, he might have been ready to think, At any rate *I* have nothing to fear from these threatened judgments. But no: he sees, at one glance, that they are hanging over (and to all appearance he has no other feeling than that they are justly hanging over) both himself and his people.

We are not left to our own conjectures, however, to discover how far Josiah's reverence for God's word was sincere, and how far it was an evidence that his heart was right with God. The answer which was brought him from the Lord, when he sent to enquire concerning the words of the book which had been found, while it threatened Jerusalem and its inhabitants with all the fearful judgments foretold therein, as the sure punishment of the sins of which they had been guilty, contained a gracious message for Josiah: " But to the king of Judah, which sent you to enquire of the Lord, thus shall ye say to him: Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, As touching the words which thou hast heard; because thine heart was tender, and thou hast hum-

bled thyself before the Lord, when thou heardest what I spake against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord. Behold therefore I will gather thee to thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace: and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place^b.”

Josiah was one of those, whom God elsewhere describes as poor and of a contrite spirit, and who tremble at God's word, and whom in an especial manner He regards and crowns with His favourⁱ.

Nor was the deep concern which Josiah manifested merely a matter of passing feeling,—the excitement of the moment, such as many have while they are listening to the word read or preached, and think, because they have it, that it is a sign of good; but which wears off presently, and has no real and lasting effect upon their character and conduct. The whole of Josiah's life, from that time to the day of his death, shewed what a deep hold the word of God had

^b 2 Kings xxii. 18—20.

ⁱ Isai. lxvi. 2.

taken of his heart, how thoroughly he had accepted it as his guide and counsellor, how resolved he was, and how he acted according to his resolution, that it should be his only standard of duty and rule of conduct. The chapter, which we have just heard as the first Lesson this afternoon, gives the history of his proceedings during the remainder of his life, that is, for about thirteen years; and if we should sum up those proceedings in one word, we could not describe them better, than by saying, that they were one unceasing endeavour to frame himself and his kingdom in all respects according to the requirements of God's law. And by God's blessing he was enabled to do very much towards cleansing the land from the mass of pollution, which, during the reigns of the kings that had gone before him, had been accumulating. But, alas! acceptable as his endeavours were in God's sight, Judah had gone too far in sin to be recovered, without the severe discipline of those heavy judgments which were ere long to burst upon it. The land must be laid waste, and the temple levelled with the ground, and the people carried into captivity, and schooled there for seventy years,

till they should learn to know and reverence the God of their fathers.

God shewed His mercy and loving-kindness towards Josiah, by removing him from the world before these judgments came. His end might seem, in the eyes of those who look only at the outside of things, by no means a desirable one. He died in battle, and that in the flower of his age. But God seeth not as man seeth. "The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come^k." An early death is no token of God's displeasure; it may be a mark of His love. In Josiah's case it was so beyond a doubt. Happy are they who are living as Josiah lived, making it their one main care to serve God and do His will, to be found in the path of duty, and in the way of God's providence; and all the while resting their hopes of acceptance with God, not on their faithfulness, nor their sincerity, nor their zeal, nor any thing else of their own, but simply and entirely on Christ's merits. To them death, come when it may, and awful as

^k Isai. lvii. 1.

it must be to all who view it seriously, need have no real terrors. For the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth them the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ¹.

Thus we have followed the course of Josiah's history, from his childhood to his death. And the one feature of his character, which stands out prominently, in every part of it, is a steadfast unswerving endeavour to do God's will. He is thoroughly consistent. He walks according to the light he has at first, and God, as He uniformly does in such cases, gives him more; for doubtless the discovery of the book of the law was providentially designed as a reward for his faithfulness in using the light which he had to begin with. And the better he knows God's law, the more diligent and zealous he is in keeping it. This is that true consistency of character which holds on its unswerving way, through evil report and through good report, to the end, and which God will accept and reward in that day, when half-heartedness, and hypocrisy, and insincerity, however they may have been concealed or

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 56, 57.

disguised for a time, shall be covered with everlasting shame.

Do we desire to tread in Josiah's steps, my brethren, and to manifest the same holy consistency, which he manifested, to the end of our course? We know where we must obtain the ability to do so; even at the same inexhaustible fountain of grace from which Josiah drew. Nothing is more important to bear in mind, in reading the histories of God's servants, than that, by nature, they were men of like passions with ourselves. If they had not the very same temptations to struggle against which we have, they had others in their stead. Whatever they became, they became by the grace of God. And the same grace is as free to us, as it was to them. We have but to ask and we shall receive, to seek and we shall find, to knock and it shall be opened to us; and to persevere in such earnest importunity of prayer, and patient waiting upon God, to the end; adding thereto, what indeed we shall be sure to do, if we are sincere in these, continual watchfulness, and painstaking to know and do the whole will of God. These have been the unfailing characteristics of all God's saints in all ages. However

they may have varied from one another in other respects, they have all been men of prayer ; they have all “ trembled at God’s word ;” they have all been willing to take pains, and use all diligence, in watching against sin, and guarding against the enemies of their salvation, and acquiring increasing conformity to the Divine image, as believing that the Master, whom they sought to serve, was worthy of their best services, and the heaven, which they sought to win, of their utmost efforts.

SERMON XIV.

SELF-JUSTIFICATION.

LUKE x. 29.

*But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus,
And who is my neighbour?*

WHILE our blessed Lord was teaching on a certain occasion, a lawyer put a question to Him, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus referred him to the holy book, which it was his special business to be acquainted with, and to expound: "What is written in the Law? How readest thou?" The lawyer answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And He said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is

my neighbour?" upon which our Lord went on to relate the Parable of the good Samaritan: shewing him an instance of a Samaritan treating a Jew as his neighbour, notwithstanding the hatred which existed between the Jews and the Samaritans; and so teaching him, that there was no one in the world, not even his greatest enemy, who did not come within the meaning of that word "neighbour."

It is not my purpose, however, to dwell upon the Parable; the point to which I wish to direct your attention is the motive which gave birth to the lawyer's enquiry:—his wish to justify himself. "He, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?" He knew that he could not say of every man that he loved him as himself. Perhaps there were some whom he hated rather than loved. Still he did not like, on that account, to regard himself as shut out from eternal life. The word "neighbour" might probably admit of qualification, and perhaps, when it came to be properly limited, he might find that he was not far short of what the law required.

This spirit of self-justification is a part of our common nature. It was given us

for wise and good ends, but too often, (except in so far as, by the grace of God, it is corrected,) we pervert it, and turn it to a wrong use. I shall try, with God's help, to point out some of the various forms under which it manifests itself, and to shew, as I proceed, the folly and danger of yielding to it.

There are then three general heads to which self-justification may be referred: Men wish to justify themselves in their own eyes, in their neighbour's eyes, and in God's eyes.

1. In their own eyes: No man would willingly think ill of himself. Every one desires to have the approbation of his own conscience. It is God's own law. Hence when men have done, or are doing, what is wrong, or mean, or wish, to do what is wrong, they endeavour to find out excuses to satisfy themselves. And it is marvellous to what an extent some succeed in doing so. One meets at times persons who are living in the practice of wilful sin, of drunkenness, for example, or theft, or the frequent neglect of public worship, or of the Lord's Supper, or even grosser breaches of God's law; who yet will lay their hands upon

their hearts, and declare that they have nothing upon their consciences, they are not afraid to die. "Such is the way," saith Solomon, "of an adulterous woman; she eateth and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness*." But these are extreme cases. The same spirit of self-justification shews itself in persons who would be shocked at the thought of going such lengths as these. In fact, let each of us only look into his own heart; let him observe what passes there when he has said or done any thing which he feels, on his first impression, to be contrary to the strict standard of God's law, or when he has neglected to do what his conscience whispers he ought to have done. Is not there an immediate casting about for excuses and palliations? For instance, suppose a man has omitted some particular duty, or neglected some opportunity of shewing kindness; what an anxiety is there to convince himself, that, in the case in question, the neglect was justifiable; other people would have acted in the same way, and do so act continually; and even if the duty had been done, or the kindness had been

* Prov. xxx. 20.

shewn, things perhaps would not have been otherwise in the end. And men ask the opinion of their friends, who often, from being indulgent to their own failings, are ready to make ample allowance for those of others, and thus they confirm themselves in the persuasion, that they are not wrong after all; that they are, in fact, needlessly scrupulous, and that they ought to dismiss all further thoughts about the matter, and not suffer their minds to be disquieted any longer. This is that self-justification, which we are prone to practise upon ourselves; the endeavour to appear as respectable as possible in our own eyes.

Now consider the folly and danger of such conduct. What can be more absurd than for a man to shut his eyes against his true condition, especially, when, by doing so, he is exposing himself the more certainly to the danger which he dreads. Suppose a man had lost his way in some wild and dangerous country, and he was wandering farther and farther from his course; what should we think, if, instead of listening to his fears, and, at any rate, trying to find out the right path, he should press forward, saying to himself at each step he took, that

he was sure he was right! Or, suppose a man were, day by day, becoming more and more unwell, and the symptoms of some dangerous illness were upon him; what should we think, if he were to struggle against the conviction that every now and then forced itself upon his mind, and try to persuade himself that all was right, till the disease had gained strength, and the art of medicine was of no avail? Or, suppose a man were living beyond his income, and were involving himself more and more deeply in debt, what should we think, if, instead of looking into his accounts, and seeing how his affairs stood, and retrenching his expenses, he should dash the unwelcome thought from his mind, and hold on in his accustomed course till he had ruined himself, and perhaps many others with him? Thinking ourselves safe, does not make us safe. Nay, rather, it is the very way to bring ourselves into danger. It leads us to neglect precautions. It hardens us in our evil courses, and it gives us over, as an easy prey, to our watchful enemy. I know few things more painful,—at least, which ought to be more painful,—than to come into a sick room, and find a person, who perhaps

may have in a very few days to appear before God, perfectly satisfied with himself, acknowledging indeed that he has done some things in the course of his life which were not quite right, but declaring that in the main he has nothing to give him cause of alarm : while all the while there is but too great reason to fear, that his heart has never had any other object of its affection than this present world, that he has lived in the neglect of God, and heaven, and his own soul, all his days, and is dying as he has lived.

2. So much for the justification of ourselves in our own eyes. There is another respect in which men seek to justify themselves, and that is, in the eyes of their neighbours. We read much of this in Scripture. It was the besetting sin of the Pharisees ; not that they did not also seek to justify themselves in their own ;—they deceived themselves first before they deceived others ;—but it is, as making themselves appear righteous in the sight of others, that we read of them the most frequently. “ Ye are they,” said our Lord, “ which justify yourselves before men ; but God knoweth your hearts^b.” And in another

^b Luke xvi. 15.

place He testifies of them, that “all their works they did to be seen of men;” that they “made clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they were full of extortion and excess:” that they were “like whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but within are full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness; even so outwardly they appeared righteous unto men, but within they were full of hypocrisy and iniquity^c.”

But let us observe some of the forms under which this disposition shews itself. It soon makes its appearance. Children tell lies, to justify themselves, to hide their faults, and make themselves seem guiltless when they are guilty. Let parents, who really love their children, and desire their best interest, be on their guard here, and check most vigilantly every approach to this vice. It is of unspeakable consequence that children should acquire a strict love of truth from their very earliest years. Lying is a hateful sin indeed, and it serves as a cloak under which to introduce all other sins. There are few persons more hopeless, humanly speaking, than a confirmed liar.

^c Matt. xxiii. 5. 25—28.

There is no foundation in him on which to build. All is hollow and unsound.

But odious and detestable as lying is, it has many degrees, and perhaps real single-hearted sincerity is one of the rarest virtues to be met with. For I come back again to the matter of which we are speaking, the spirit of self-justification, the desire to appear better in our neighbour's eyes than we really deserve. There are many who would be shocked at the thought of a deliberate lie, who yet, if they would examine, would find far too much room for suspecting themselves to be wanting in strict sincerity. Let us look honestly into our own hearts, and shake off the self-deceit which lies coiled around them. Do we know nothing of such feelings as these :—A constant carefulness to put the best appearance we can on our conduct, sometimes perhaps a better appearance than truth will bear ? Ascribing what we do, or mean to do, to other motives than really weigh with us ? Are not we conscious sometimes of being more anxious to secure man's esteem than God's ; to appear well in man's eyes than in God's ; more afraid of being thought to do wrong than of doing wrong ; more pained at being known to come

short of God's law, than at actually coming short of it? I will but give a single instance; let each judge of it as his conscience shall direct him. Suppose we had been guilty of any irreverence in our prayers, that our thoughts had been wandering, and we had forgotten in whose presence we were; should we have been distressed half so much if it had been all in secret between God and ourselves, as we should, if it had betrayed itself in our countenance or demeanour? We little think, perhaps, how much of the humiliation and sorrow which there may be in some cases arises from regard for man's opinion rather than from regard for God's.

Now I do not say that it is wrong to have regard for man's opinion. This mutual desire of one another's esteem is one of the secret links by which society is bound together: and God has put it into our breasts for this end. But the point at which I aim is this, the evil of making it our idol; of being so bent upon securing man's good opinion, that we are more anxious to have it than to deserve it. This was the Pharisees' sin. They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. They were more careful to put on the outward show of reli-

gion, than to be religious. And one chief reason why they were so bitter in their hatred of our blessed Lord was, because the high standard which He held forth, and the holy example which He exhibited, put their wretched tinsel excellency to shame. And this indeed is another of the ways in which the spirit of self-justification often shews itself. It makes men ready to detract from the merits of those who pursue a higher walk of godliness, than that to which they aspire. When people are angry with any for being needlessly strict, they have good reason to suspect, what probably their own consciences have already whispered, that the real reason is because the strictness they find fault with is a silent reproach of their own laxity.

And here, likewise, we may see the folly and danger of self-justification. After all, how light a matter is it to be judged of man's judgment! Man is not our judge. God will not take counsel with man respecting us, nor be biassed by man's recommendation at the last day. And even in this present world, what so fickle and uncertain as human applause? The crowd which one day cried "Hosanna to the Son of David,"

had no other word upon their tongues the next, than "Crucify Him, crucify Him." And for the most part, they who are the most anxious to stand well in the world's esteem, do, in their very anxiety, lose it. And they often in the end obtain the most of it, who are the most raised above regard for it. Look at those holy men, whose praises are now in every Christian's mouth, the Apostles: there was a time, when they were scorned and derided; when it even required no small share of courage for any one to acknowledge their acquaintance. St. Paul mentions it as an especial ground of praise in Onesiphorus, that he was not ashamed of his chain^d; and he intreats Timothy, "Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me, His prisoner^e." But it is not only foolish to be so unduly anxious to obtain man's good opinion; it is dangerous also. We cannot seek it in such wise without sin. He that is always considering what men will think of him, and framing his conduct so as to gain men's approbation, will be sure to be betrayed into some wrong compliance or other. He will hold back from his duty; or he will

^d 2 Tim. i. 16.^e 2 Tim. i. 8.

countenance what is wrong ; or he will be guilty of insincerity, putting on the appearance of more religion than he really has. "How can ye believe," said our blessed Lord to the Jews, "which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" and St. John assigns it as the reason, why many among the rulers would not confess our Lord, even though in their hearts they were convinced that He was the Christ, "because they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

The great point in this matter, at which it behoves the Christian to aim, is to go straight forward, keeping constantly before his eyes that God is his judge, not man, and making it his grand business to approve himself in God's sight. O what a poor consolation will it be at the last day, to think that we have had every body's good word, if, notwithstanding, we be put to shame before men and angels!

The Christian is to study, with all his might, to maintain simplicity and sincerity ; to think more about being religious than about seeming religious. Some men have

^f John v. 44.

^s John xii. 43.

a dread of hypocrisy, and glory in professing nothing more than what they really are. They say, If we are not religious, at least we do not pretend to be so. But surely the right method is to raise their standard; to be religious, and then they will naturally and without hypocrisy seem so too.

3. But I pass on to the third description of self-justification, the justifying of ourselves before God. There is a close connexion between this, and that which was first mentioned—the justifying of ourselves in our own eyes. For he that seeks his own esteem, seeks the esteem of his conscience, which is God's deputy and representative in his heart. Still there is a sufficient distinction between the two to allow of their being treated separately.

Men seek to justify themselves before God, when they build their hopes of acceptance with Him upon their own righteousness. They cannot do this without palliating their sins. And so they devise excuses, they explain away the plain meaning of Scripture, they qualify what they read, and ask questions, and say, it surely does not mean this and this. This was

the lawyer's course. He wanted to know, "who was his neighbour."

But it will not do. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy^b." "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousnessⁱ." We shall never obtain a true and scriptural peace by attempting to excuse ourselves. The course which God has pointed out to us is to confess all. "Only acknowledge thine iniquity^k." As long as David persisted in sullen silence, so long he had nothing but disquiet. But the moment he acknowledged his guilt, the prophet declared "The Lord also hath put away thy sin^l." The Publican, whose heart was so full of one subject that it could give utterance to no other prayer than "God be merciful to me a sinner," went down to his house justified, while the Pharisee, who dwelt so much upon his own merits, carried back with him the same burthen of guilt which he had brought^m.

^b Prov. xxviii. 13. ⁱ 1 John i. 8, 9. ^k Jerem. iii. 13.

^l Psalm xxxii. 3—5. 2 Sam. xii. 13. ^m Luke xviii. 9—14.

Learn then, my dear brethren, the true way of obtaining acceptance with God. Cease to trust in your own goodness. Do not be anxious to frame excuses for what you have done wrong. Be willing to see the depth of your iniquity, though it is such a depth, that, if you should view it in its real character, you would shudder at beholding it; just as a man would shudder on looking down some huge precipice. And yet, deep as it is, it is not beyond the reach of Christ's sacrifice and God's mercy. Here lies our security, that Christ hath paid the penalty of our guilt; that we stand before God, not in our own righteousness, which is nothing worth, but in Christ's, which is all-sufficient.

Nor are those, who have hitherto been strangers to serious religion, the only persons who need to be reminded of this truth. Even the Christian, who has made some progress in the ways of God, requires to have it brought before him, from time to time. The real secret of peace, and happiness, and fruitfulness in good works, consists in keeping the eye of our faith steadfastly fixed on Christ. But we are ever liable to have our thoughts diverted from this object. Satan tempts us to sin; and if he succeeds,

he then either fixes our minds upon the heinousness of what we have done, or leads us to excuse and palliate it : in the one case, urging us on to despair ; in the other, to carelessness and presumption. But our wisdom is to watch against sin with all vigilance ; and if any man sin, to remember that we still have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous^a ; and so to flee to Him without delay, and seek to have our guilt washed out in His blood.

There are, however, dangers on the other side to be watched against. It is an easy thing to say " I am a sinner, a great sinner ;" and it is possible that the very desire of appearing well in man's eyes may lead persons to make confessions which savour of humility, in order to seem humble. But it is not the saying these words, nor the making any confessions, which go no further than words, that will serve the turn. God looks at the heart ; and that which He requires, is a sincere renunciation of our own righteousness and abhorrence of sin, such as to bring us as penitents, who have nothing of their own to offer, to His footstool. Let it be our care then, not merely to acknowledge that there

^a 1 John ii. 1.

is no health in us, but to feel that there is not.

And this brings me once more to the point which I have already touched upon, in reference to our justifying ourselves in the sight of men, the great importance, nay the indispensable necessity, of sincerity. Religion is nothing without sincerity. We must be in earnest, else it is mere acting and hypocrisy, and that will pass for nothing with God. And the secret spring of earnestness is faith. Let faith open a man's eyes to see the realities around him; shew him the misery which throughout all ages awaits the ungodly; the blessedness, such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, which God hath prepared for them that love Him; shew him Christ, first taking our nature upon Him, and shedding forth His blood upon the cross, and then sitting upon the judgment-seat; shew him God ever present with him, yea trying his heart and reins:—I say, let faith bring such a prospect as this before his view, and let the Spirit of God at the same time touch his heart with the sense of it, and he will have no choice left him but to be in earnest. God grant us all

this precious faith, and quicken us from the death of sloth and sin, and raise us up to newness of life, that we may press forward seriously and earnestly, and may bear ourselves with all simplicity and godly sincerity both towards Himself, and towards our fellow-men, for Jesus Christ's sake.

SERMON XV.

THE REWARD OF FORSAKING ALL FOR CHRIST.

MATT. xix. 29.

Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

THE Christian's life is a life of faith. It is, from first to last, a giving up of present advantages for the sake of future. God bids us renounce whatever we cannot keep with a good conscience: and he promises us, instead, abundantly more than we renounce, even here, and infinitely more, hereafter. Faith believes, and embraces, and acts upon, the promise; and the Christian lives by exercising such faith. His whole life is a manifestation of it.

The disciples had just heard with amazement our Lord's declaration, that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into

the kingdom of God ;” and they had been present when he bade the young ruler (when he came and asked Him what good thing he must do that he might have eternal life) go and sell that he had, and give to the poor, and he should have treasure in heaven, and come, and follow Him. Upon this, Peter, who seems to have been always the most forward, said to our Lord “ Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed Thee ; what shall we have therefore ?” Perhaps, at a later time, and when he knew himself better, and knew Christ’s religion better, Peter would not have been so forward to speak of what he had given up, or suffered, or done, for Christ : he would have felt that all was infinitely below what Christ had given up, and suffered, and done, for him ; and very much below what Christ might have expected at his hands. Such, however, was Peter’s question.

Now hear our Lord’s answer : “ Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Thus far His answer con-

cerned the Apostles ; and it assured them, that whatsoever they had given up for Christ here on earth, and how lowly and despised soever their circumstances, and how great soever their privations, the day would come, when they should be abundantly, and far more than abundantly, recompensed. Christ Himself, lowly as He seemed now, should resume His glory, the glory which He had with the Father before the world was ; and they should be advanced to share it with Him. In the regeneration, that is, in that day, when He should make all things new, new heavens and a new earth,—In the regeneration when the Son of Man should sit in the throne of His glory, they also should sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The language is such as is used to describe earthly majesty, the majesty of a great king, surrounded by his principal officers of state, each of whom has an inferior sovereignty under him. And the idea intended to be conveyed is, that the Apostles, as they had shared their Lord's humiliation, here, should share, in like manner, His exaltation, hereafter, and that, in a degree beyond the lot of ordinary Christians.

But even the least and lowest of Christ's servants shall have an abundant recompense. For our Lord proceeds, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, (even in this present world; St. Mark adds, "with persecutions*,") and shall inherit everlasting life." "But," he continues, referring probably to Judas among others, "many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first." Many that have now the chief place, whether as regards spiritual privileges, or this world's advantages, shall be degraded, and put in the lowest room; while many that have now the lowest place, shall be put in the highest.

In these words then, our blessed Lord sets before us the reward which He has in store for His true disciples. Let us fix our thoughts upon it, and contemplate it, till our hearts glow with the intense desire of making it our own.

Observe, it consists of two distinct parts, the reward bestowed in this life, and the reward bestowed in the next. Observe too,

* Mark x. 30.

on whom it is bestowed ; with what attendant circumstances, as far as regards this life, our Lord, as St. Mark relates His words, connects it ; and what caution our Lord couples with it. These will supply us with sufficient matter for our meditation : only may God be pleased to vouchsafe the gift of His Spirit, that whatsoever is suggested to us may be received as good seed into the good ground of prepared hearts, and bring forth fruit to His honour and glory, and our souls' profit.

I. To consider first the persons on whom the reward is bestowed : They are described as those who have given up houses, brethren, sisters, fathers, mothers, wives, children, lands, in a word, whatsoever men value the most and account the dearest in this life, for Christ's sake.

In the first beginning of the Gospel, this was no more than men were often called to literally and in the strictest sense of the words. It often happened, that one member of a family became a Christian, while the rest remained Jews or Heathens ; and then, such is the hatred of the natural heart against the truth, he was cast off and

disowned. So that the case stood thus with him; he must either reject the Gospel, on which he had placed all his hopes, or be rejected by his nearest and dearest friends. In like manner, by becoming a Christian, a man would often draw upon himself the displeasure of his employers, and throw himself out of work; not to speak of the cruel laws which soon came to be framed, by which a man, the moment he embraced Christianity, subjected himself to the loss of his property, and even of his liberty and his life. It happened in numberless instances then, literally and in the strictest sense of the words, that men were called upon to give up all these for Christ's sake. And thousands did give them up willingly and cheerfully, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures, and honours, and preferments, of the world.

Whether we shall ever be called upon to make the very same sacrifices, we cannot tell. God only knows. But there are many things more unlikely. Times of persecution for the truth's sake may be at hand; and we may have to go through trials, such as the early Christians had to go through, which may put our faith to the test, and

shew us of what material it is made, whether it is such as will stand the fire or not.

In any case, however, there is no one who is not, in some sense or other, called upon to make sacrifices of this description, if he would be Christ's true servant.

For instance, if a man is not called upon to give up his property, for Christ's sake, yet he is called upon to give up all ungodly gains, all ways and means of obtaining money or worldly goods, which are inconsistent with a good conscience; yea, and if he have obtained money or worldly goods unjustly, and to his neighbour's wrong, to restore what he has so obtained. He is called upon to forsake all occupations and employments which are of an ensnaring tendency, and which he cannot pursue without danger to his soul. Yea, and he is to hold all he has, as remembering that it is not his own but God's, and he but a steward of it, and bound to lay it out for God's glory, and his neighbour's good, as well as for himself. And if, at any time, it shall please God, in His providence, to take it, or any part of it, back again, he is called upon to acquiesce cheerfully and without murmuring, knowing that all things are wisely and mer-

cifully ordered as well as justly, and knowing too that he has in heaven a better and more enduring inheritance, the securing of which, it may be, made it necessary that he should be deprived of his earthly possessions, or a portion of them.

Again; if a man is not called upon to forsake his nearest and dearest friends, for Christ's sake, as many were in former days, yet he is called upon to renounce and give up whatever is contrary to the Gospel, whatever is sinful and ensnaring, no matter whom he displeases by so doing; and this may, in some instances, estrange those from him with whom he was once bound by the closest ties of friendship, or with whom he is still bound by the closest ties of blood. Further, he is called upon to withdraw himself from the society of wicked companions and such as would prove a snare to him, and either directly lead him to sin, or, by accustoming him to see and hear what is wrong, take off his abhorrence and dread of sin. No man can be a safe or fit associate for a Christian, who is living in the practice of evil. A sabbath-breaker, a drunkard, one who blasphemes God's name,—how can any one, who fears God, and

regards his own soul, keep company with such a one, unless in a case where duty and God's providence unavoidably place him in his society? And then his being so placed will be a matter of continual alarm to him. "Woe is me," will be his feeling, "that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar^b;" and he will stir himself up to continual watchfulness and prayer, lest that by any means he should come to think sinless hateful, from having it so frequently before his eyes.

In such cases then, a man is called upon to give up those who once perhaps were very near and dear to him, because he cannot continue in their society safely, and consistently with his Christian profession. And there are other cases, where God, in His providence, removes from him to another world the relations or the friends who were as dear to him as his own soul; and in these he is called upon to acquiesce, with cheerful resignation, in the will of the all-wise and all-good God, saying, like Job, from his inmost heart, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord^c." And if he cannot reach this

^b Ps. cxx. 5.

^c Job i. 21.

at first, yet it is what he is bound to aim at, and strive after ; and his doing so, for Christ's sake, will make the sacrifice as truly acceptable in God's sight, as if it had been literally the forsaking of father, or mother, or husband, or wife, or brethren, or sisters, to which, in former days, Christians were often called.

II. Now see the reward promised to those who make such sacrifices for Christ :

1. And first, the reward in this world : They " shall receive a hundred fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands^d." Yes, even in this life, Christ's servants have an abundant recompence. Even in this life, the advantages of godliness very far outweigh the pleasures, or seeming pleasures, of sin. Satan indeed, and those who would do his work, endeavour to make men believe the contrary. They represent religion as gloomy and uninviting ; and, in some instances, those who have made a profession of religion, but who have not really entered into the spirit of it, have given countenance to the representation. But in reality it is the only sure way to peace and happiness.

^d Mark x. 30.

It is very true, God's servants have their trials, as our Lord intimates in St. Mark's account of His words, when He says, they shall have the blessings He speaks of "with persecutions." They are exposed to the same afflictions as other men. Pain, and sickness, and worldly losses, and the death of friends, may happen, and do happen, to them as well as to others. And besides these, they are liable to other afflictions which come upon them through their religion. Persecution was the most frequent form which those afflictions took in early days; and if persecution has now ceased, yet the afflictions themselves have not ceased. They have only taken another form. There is still the hatred of the natural heart against Christ and those who belong to Christ, according to our Lord's words to His disciples, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you*." A man can hardly lead a true Christian life, acting up to the high standard which the Gospel sets before him, or at least striving to act up to it,

* John xv. 19.

without drawing down upon himself dislike and opposition from those who are vexed in their hearts at the rebuke which his conduct silently conveys to themselves. And besides, the very endeavour to lead a Christian life calls for continued mortification and self-denial, as is implied plainly enough when it is described as being a crucifixion of the flesh with the affections and lusts¹. No man can lead a holy and consistent life, without having a great deal to struggle with in subduing the evil that is in his heart, the evil lusts, the evil passions, the evil tempers, as well as the evil habits which have grown from the indulgence of these in time past. God's servants have their trials then as well as other men, and in some respects, it may be, more than other men. But yet, as I said, with all this, their lot, even in this present world, is a far happier lot than that of other men. If they forsake some things for Christ, yet these are made up, and far more than made up, to them. Have they lost the friendship, for instance, of those who were once numbered among their dearest friends? Are they disowned by those with whom they are still

¹ Gal. v. 24.

bound by the closest ties of blood and relationship? And are they not gainers a hundred fold, and far more than a hundred fold, in Christ? Is not Christ their Head, and, in Christ, are not all Christ's people their brethren; and this, not merely in name, but in reality? And is not the reality felt and owned, in exact proportion as Christians are what they ought to be? Do not true Christians, and such as have the divine life flourishing within them, regard each other as brethren, and love each other as brethren? And are they not ready to act towards each other as brethren, sympathising with each other's sorrows, ministering to each other's necessities, and supplying each other's wants? If there is less of this to be seen than might have been looked for, is it not because there is less of real godliness than might have been looked for; and because those who have it have it in a less degree than they might and ought; and yet further, because there is so much division and separation among Christians, so that they are estranged from each other who should have been one both outwardly in profession and inwardly in heart and affection? It was not so in the first beginning of the Gospel; though, alas! the perfect

harmony and unanimity which prevailed among the earliest converts was soon broken. But till they were broken, our Lord's words were literally verified in the sight of all men, "the multitude of them that believed being of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common^g." So literally and visibly did those, who gave up houses, and lands, and brethren, and sisters, and the like, for Christ's sake, receive a hundred fold, through their union with Christ, and, in Christ, with His people.

And besides this, there is another sense in which godliness has very greatly the advantage of ungodliness even here on earth, and that is, in the inward peace and tranquillity which religion ministers to those who yield themselves heartily to its influence. "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked^h." It is not the possession of worldly goods that can make a man happy. Let a man have the wealth of a whole kingdom, what better is he for it, if he has a discontented mind, or a bad temper, or an accusing conscience?

^g Acts iv. 32.

^h Ps. xxxvii. 16.

On the other hand, let a man be so poor, that, besides food and raiment sufficient for his present wants, he has nothing, yet if his heart is at peace with God, and, being at peace with God, is in charity with all men; if his mind is contented and cheerful, thankful for the past and present, confiding for the future; if he has an approving conscience; if he has a good hope, through Christ, of eternal life; what riches in the world are to be compared with his? How striking is the Psalmist's description of the blessedness of God's servants, even in the midst of outward trials! "O how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee, before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy presence from the pride of man; Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues¹."

2. Happy, however, as is the lot of Christ's servants here on earth, their present happiness is but a slight foretaste of the perfect happiness which awaits them hereafter. They would have more happiness even here if they were more holy. For sin

¹ Ps. xxxi. 19, 20.

is the main source, if not, in one shape or other, directly or indirectly, the only source, of unhappiness. In heaven there will be no sin, nothing to mar the full enjoyment of their bliss. Every thing outwardly will be of a tendency to make them happy ; and every thing within will be in keeping and in harmony with it. What the joys of heaven are, we can at best form but a very faint and imperfect conception. Scripture speaks sparingly of them ; and if it had spoken more at large, perhaps we have not in our present state faculties to comprehend them. Our Lord sums them all up in these two words, " Eternal life"—Life, and that life eternal. What is dearer to a man than life, even in the ordinary sense of that word ? Take away life, and you take away all capability of enjoyment. Take away life, and man becomes a dull senseless clod of earth. But when our Lord speaks of life, He has life of another sort in view than merely that by which our bodies are animated and kept in being. The bodily life consists in the union of the body with the soul : the life of which our Lord speaks consists in the union of the soul with God. And it involves, when per-

fect, as it will be in heaven, entire freedom from sin, and a capacity for the enjoyment of spiritual and heavenly joys. And it will be spent in God's immediate presence, and in a degree of communion with Him, of which, however His servants may have some slight foretastes here, none probably can form any adequate conception till they are actually made partakers of it. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God," says St. John, "and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is^k." "We shall be like Him;" "We shall see Him as He is." This is almost the sum and substance of what is revealed to us. Are we growing like Him now; acquiring more and more conformity to His image, purifying ourselves as He is pure? Do we see Him in some measure by the eye of faith, and know something of the privilege of holding communion with Him in prayer and in His ordinances? Then we may guess in some faint measure what is that life which our Lord promises. Let us press forward, and seek to increase in these, that we may understand more. But yet,

^k 1 John iii. 2.

when we have reached the utmost that we can on earth, we shall come infinitely short of the reality.

And this blessed life is eternal. Every thing around us is transitory and fleeting ; some things endure longer than others, but decay and destruction are written upon all ; or, if on any they are not written in letters plain enough for the generality of men to read, there is not one on which Scripture has not inscribed them. The earth itself, which has seen so many generations ; the sun, and moon, and stars, which shine on us as they shone on Adam, and will continue to shine possibly for generations yet to come ; must all one day have an end. But that blessed life, of which God's servants shall be made partakers, will endure, when earth, and sun, and moon, and stars, are swept away ; and will continue to endure throughout endless ages, ever youthful, ever fresh, and perhaps increasing without limit in its capacities of enjoyment.

Such are the blessings which God has in store for His people ; such is the reward with which He will recompense those who have sacrificed whatever He has called them to sacrifice, for His sake. Who is not

ready to cry out in the Psalmist's words, "Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with Thy salvation, that I may see the good of Thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation, that I may glory with Thine inheritance¹?" But it is not wishing for these blessings that will bring them to us. We must arise and seek them in God's appointed way, and that way is none other than that in which His saints have trod from the beginning, following the footsteps of their Lord; a way rugged in some respects, but strewn with flowers in others; a way of painstaking, and diligence, and self-denial, and yet a way full of spiritual joys and heavenly consolations to those that will walk in it with patient and resolute feet.

Yet all, alas! will not walk in it, even of those who seem to do so, and would fain persuade themselves that they are doing so. And some of those who are overlooked and slighted, as though they had never set foot on it, and were never likely to set foot on it, are walking in it, or will one day walk in it. "Many that are first shall be last,

¹ Psalm cvi. 4, 5.

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and the last first." It is not the having high privileges that will save us, nor the being well reputed of as religious persons; but it is the sincere, earnest, hearty, dedication of ourselves to God's service, while, at the same time, we utterly renounce our own merits and our own righteousness, that we may rest all our hope and all our confidence in Christ, and in Christ alone.

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